May 1st WHY do I need saving?

May 8th WHERE IS ? ? ?

May 15th

May 22nd

May 29th

June 5th

June 12th

June 19th

June 26th – O gone

July 3rd

July 10th

July 17th – O gone

July 24th – O gone

July 31st

August 7th

August 14th

August 21st

August 28th

Also gone: 9/4th, 9/11th, 10/16th

Handouts: Wk.3 Isaiah 59 H.O.

**SAVED** means What?

**Week 3:** The Anatomy of Sin

**[All scripture is in CEB version unless otherwise noted.]**

**Review: Week 1:** Question #1: WHY do I need saving? Question #2:WHY was man created? Question #3:So, WHAT does God want with man? Question #4:Why did He offer a way of salvation? (Grace)

**Week 2:** Where is THE FATHER? Where is THE SON? Where is THE HOLY SPIRIT?(Atonement)

**Week 3:** The Anatomy of Sin

“It is essential we understand the goal of evil that beckons our free will to worship it.

So when we experience salvation, we can, with uncanny perception, recognize the shadow of evil trying to convince us that we are still its captive.” P.O.

**A Working STRUCTURE:**

**SIN** births condemnation which produces **SHAME** (a wounding of our conscience) that births **GUILT** (a wounding of our conscience) that puts up a shield of **ALIENATION** from God.

**FEAR** results from this new distance from God.

* Estrangement is produced in here.
* Guilt & Shame produce their own unhealthy mixture of emotional stimuli that evokes new and unwanted motivation to GET AWAY, BE GONE, DISAPPEAR….

“Our own conscience accuses us as we have the breath of God in us.” P.O. (spirit)

1. **Who Owns Original Sin?**

**Understanding Guilt:**

* Guilt from **original sin** – original sin opened the door for condemnation for all mankind.
* Imputed (not inherited) to us from Adam and Eve’s choice.
* Opened the door for evil to own territory on the earth.
* Opened the door for the infection of evil to permeate mankind.
* Making it **impossible** to be shielded from its affect.
* Makes it more difficult to wield our freewill to live obedient to the laws of God.

**A/DA** “We do not come into the world morally neutral.”

Ryken, P. G. (2001). [*The Message of Salvation: By God’s Grace, for God’s Glory*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bsttsalvation?ref=Page.p+12&off=1553&ctx=Hendrickson%2c+1987).%0a~K%C3%A4hler%2c+Martin%2c+The+) (D. Tidball, Ed.; p. 32). Inter-Varsity Press.

**Genesis 3:7-24**

***7****Then* ***they both saw clearly and knew that they were naked****. So they sewed fig leaves together and made garments for themselves.*

The connection of what they seen and how to define it was now being sieved through a sin-tinged lens. Naked was just naked until the juice of the apple trickled down their disobedient throats. SHAME became a human response. [First attempt at “salvation” (I can fix this) through human effort]

***8****During that day’s cool evening breeze, they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden; and the man and his wife* ***hid******themselves*** *from the Lord God in the middle of the garden’s trees*

Shame, a personal response, births GUILT. The knowledge, the recognition of disobedience.

*.****9****The Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”*

***10****The man[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=gen+3&version=CEB#fen-CEB-66b)*] replied, “I heard your sound in the garden; I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.”*

***11****He said, “****Who told you*** *that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree, which I commanded you not to eat?”*

We can now use this knowledge of “being told” as a weapon of authority. i.e. “That’s a lie!”

***12****The man said, “The woman you gave me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.”*

Guilt hates holding responsibility and it births BLAME.

The first step into the new relationship between men and women – DOMINATION.

***13****The Lord God said to the woman, “What have you done?!”*

*And the woman said, “The snake tricked me, and I ate.”*

Guilt hates holding responsibility and it births BLAME.

**CONSEQUENCES:**

***14****The Lord God said to the snake,*

*“Because you did this,  
    you are the one cursed - out of all the farm animals,  out of all the wild animals.  
    On your belly you will crawl,  and dust you will eat every day of your life.*

***15****I will put contempt*

*between you and the woman,  
    between your* ***offspring*** *and hers.  
They will strike your head,  
        but you will strike at their heels.”*

Protoevangelium – First promise of the Bible.

Offspring is both plural = Eve’s descendants and singular = a single champion The Messiah

***16****To the woman he said,*

*“I will make your pregnancy very painful;  
            in pain you will bear children.  
You will desire your husband,  
        but he will rule over you.”*

This is a **consequence, not a directive**. She already experienced it and participated in the dominance game.

***17****To the man he said, “Because you listened to your wife’s voice and you ate from the tree that I commanded, ‘Don’t eat from it,’*

*cursed is the fertile land because of you;   in pain you will eat from it  every day of your life.****18****Weeds and thistles will grow for you, even as you eat the field’s plants;* ***19****by the sweat of your face you will eat bread—  until you return to the fertile land,  since from it you were taken;  you are soil, to the soil you will return.”*

Earth will fight you for your existence.

Even worse, we seek to dominate one another. This is the meaning of God’s subsequent curse against Eve: *‘Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you’* (Gen. 3:16b). This verse does not mean, as is sometimes suggested, that the man’s spiritual authority in the home and in the church is a result of the fall. Nor does it have anything to do with sex, at least not directly. Rather, it is a prophecy about the battle of the sexes and the struggle for power in all human relationships. The Hebrew word for ‘desire’ (*tešûqâ*) next appears in Genesis 4:7, where it describes sin’s desire to gain mastery over Cain. In much the same way, **the woman desires mastery over the man and will manipulate him to get it.**

Meanwhile the man rules over the woman, not as a servant leader, but as a harsh taskmaster. The Hebrew word for ‘rule’ (*māšal*) is a word for military attack, even abuse. **The man seeks to take control of the woman; if he has to, he will use force to get it.**

This is what it means for us to be estranged from one another. Not only are we isolated from one another, but we seek to manipulate and dominate one another emotionally, spiritually and sometimes even physically.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***20****The man named his wife Eve[*[*d*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=gen+3&version=CEB#fen-CEB-76d)*] because she is the mother of everyone who lives.****21****The Lord God made the man and his wife leather clothes and dressed them.*

Why did God dress them? Why could they not just go back to their innocent naked living?

Why did an animal have to die for the clothes to be made?

***22****The Lord God said, “The human being[*[*e*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=gen+3&version=CEB#fen-CEB-78e)*] has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” Now, so he doesn’t stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever,****23****the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to farm the fertile land from which he was taken.****24****He drove out the human. To the east of the garden of Eden, he stationed winged creatures wielding flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life.*

**Adam and Sin:**

To use the proper theological term, God ‘imputed’ the guilt of Adam’s sin to every member of the human race. In other words, God holds us morally responsible for what Adam did, reckoning his sin to be our sin, and condemning us for it. This is not unjust. Adam was ideally suited to serve as our representative, and he was given every opportunity to succeed.

Ryken, P. G. (2001). [*The Message of Salvation: By God’s Grace, for God’s Glory*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bsttsalvation?ref=Page.p+12&off=1553&ctx=Hendrickson%2c+1987).%0a~K%C3%A4hler%2c+Martin%2c+The+) (D. Tidball, Ed.; p. 32). Inter-Varsity Press.

* Adam & Eve were the only humans who were given the supreme opportunity to succeed in living a sin-free life.
* They faced it as an “unfallen” human.
* Knowing they were the beginning of the human race.
* They did not work for self-care as the Garden provided everything they needed.
* Food was abundant.
* The climate beyond temperate.
* Shelter was not needed.
* God, Himself, walked with them in the cool of the day.

**THIS ALL WAS A GIFT OF GOD’S GRACE.**

Ryken, P. G. (2001). [*The Message of Salvation: By God’s Grace, for God’s Glory*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bsttsalvation?ref=Page.p+12&off=1553&ctx=Hendrickson%2c+1987).%0a~K%C3%A4hler%2c+Martin%2c+The+) (D. Tidball, Ed.; p. 32). Inter-Varsity Press.

* They encountered one opportunity to sin:

**LEAVE THE TREE ALONE.**

And they, in their intensely personal life with God, could not obey this one directive.

The cost of the gift of free-will.

**How does original sin affect us?**

**Romans 5:12-21** Grace now rules

***12****Just as through one human being sin came into the world, and death came through sin, so death has come to everyone, since everyone has sinned.****13****Although sin was in the world, since there was no Law, it wasn’t taken into account until the Law came.****14But death ruled from Adam until Moses, even over those who didn’t sin in the same way Adam did—Adam was a type of the one who was coming.*** [The action of one man can be imputed to all mankind]

**“We are the offspring of Adam & Eve’s choices. And bear the stain, thereof.” P.O.**

***15****But the free gift of Christ isn’t like Adam’s failure. If many people died through what one person did wrong, God’s grace is multiplied even more for many people with the gift—of the one person Jesus Christ—that comes through grace.****16****The gift isn’t like the consequences of one person’s sin. The judgment that came from one person’s sin led to punishment, but the free gift that came out of many failures led to the verdict of acquittal.****17****If death ruled because of one person’s failure, those who receive the multiplied grace and the gift of righteousness will even more certainly rule in life through the one person Jesus Christ.*

***18So now the righteous requirements necessary for life are met for everyone through the righteous act of one person, just as judgment fell on everyone through the failure of one person****.****19****Many people were made righteous through the obedience of one person, just as many people were made sinners through the disobedience of one person.****20****The Law stepped in to amplify the failure, but where sin increased, grace multiplied even more.****21****The result is that grace will rule through God’s righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, just as sin ruled in death.*

Sin is a fundamental relationship underneath: sin is not wrongdoing, it is wrong *being,* deliberate and emphatic independence of God. God, on the ground of Redemption, has undertaken the responsibility for sin and for the removal of it, and Jesus Christ claims that He can plant in any of us His own heredity, which will re-make us into the new order of humanity. If the human race apart from Jesus Christ is all right, then the Redemption of Jesus Christ is a useless waste. The revelation is not that Jesus Christ was punished for our sins, but that He was made to be *sin*. **Oswald Chambers**

**In His perfect life, atoning death and glorious resurrection, Jesus represented His people. It was only by standing in their place that He was able to save them. Thus, in the end, being judged on someone else’s merits turns out to be the only hope of salvation.**

Ryken, P. G. (2001). [*The Message of Salvation: By God’s Grace, for God’s Glory*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bsttsalvation?ref=Page.p+32&off=1167&ctx=e+guilt+of+his+sin.%0a~Theologians+distingu) (D. Tidball, Ed.; p. 32). Inter-Varsity Press.

[Article: Meaning of Man’s Will]

1. **The Many Facets of Chosen Sin:**

At the root of all our problems lies the sinfulness of sin.

Rather than seeking God’s glory, we live for our own glory.

Sin is what makes us ashamed, for it renders us guilty in God’s sight.

Sin is what makes us afraid, for it alienates us from our Creator.

Sin is what makes us angry, for it estranges us from one another.

Sin is what makes us anxious, for it leads to suffering and finally death.

It’s just a sinful world, that’s all.[[2]](#footnote-2)

“Sin is a fundamental relationship underneath: sin is not wrongdoing, it is wrong *being,* deliberate and emphatic independence of God.” Oswald Chambers

“A darkness” that lurks around us, waiting to engulf us, with every choice we make. P.O.

**Isaiah 59:1-15**

*Look! The Lord does not lack the power to save,  
    nor are his ears too dull to hear,****2****but your misdeeds have* ***separated*** *you from your God.  
Your sins have* ***hidden His face*** *from you so that* ***you aren’t heard****.*

**Same anatomy as original sin…or is there more?**

* Separation
* Alienation

**A Working STRUCTURE:**

**SIN** births condemnation which produces **SHAME** (a wounding of our conscience) that births **GUILT** (a wounding of our conscience) that puts up a shield of **ALIENATION** from God.

**FEAR** results from this new distance from God.

* Estrangement is produced in here.
* Guilt & Shame produce their own unhealthy mixture of emotional stimuli that evokes new and unwanted motivation to GET AWAY, BE GONE, DISAPPEAR….

What else do we add to the Structure chart:

How sin affects our↓ relationship with God, with Others, with Ourselves.

↓

**Isaiah 59:1-15**

*Your hands are* ***stained*** *with blood,  
    and your fingers with* ***guilt****.* [**stained** **with** **guilt**] *Your lips speak lies;  
    your tongues mutter malice.****4****No one sues honestly;  
    no one pleads truthfully.  
By trusting in emptiness and speaking deceit,  
    they conceive harm and give* ***birth*** *to malice****.* [The growth of: Meaness. Hatred. Malevolence]*****5****They hatch adders’ eggs,  
    and weave spiderwebs.  
Whoever eats their eggs will die.  
    Moreover, the crushed egg hatches a viper.*

**[Not only separation and a desire to dominate – we take it up a notch and seek to annihilate.]**

***6****Their webs can’t serve as clothing;  
    they can’t cover themselves with their deeds.  
Their deeds are deeds of malice,  
    and the work of violence is in their hands.*

**[Violence becomes normal = Passion. Force. Fierceness. Vehemence. Vicious. Power. ]**

***7****Their feet run to evil;  
    they rush to shed innocent blood.* **[Murder]** *Their thoughts are thoughts of malice;* **[Spite. Cruelty. Wickedness. Evil.]**  *desolation and destruction litter their highways.****8****They don’t know the way of peace;  
    there’s* ***no justice*** *in their paths.  
They make their roads crooked;****no one who walks in them knows peace.***

**[We hold no value of other, of life. We seek to be God and determine right and wrong.]**

### Injustice obscures vision

***9Because of all this, justice is far from us,****and righteousness beyond our reach.*

**[Suffering ]**

*We expect light, and there is darkness;  
    we await a gleam of light, but walk about in gloom.* **[Unmet expectations. Confusion]*****10****We grope along the wall like the blind;  
    like those without eyes we grope.  
We stumble at noonday as if it were twilight,  
    and among the strong as if we were dying.****11****All of us growl like bears,  
    and like doves we moan.  
We expect justice, but there is none;  
    we await salvation, but it is far from us.****12****Our rebellions are numerous in your presence;  
    our sins testify against us.  
Our rebellions are with us;  
    we’re aware of our guilt:*

**[Deliberate disobedience. Knowing it’s evil and participating none-the-less]***13    defying and denying the Lord,  
    turning away from our God,  
    planning oppression and revolt,  
    muttering lying words conceived in our minds.  
14Justice is pushed aside;  
    righteousness stands far off,  
    because truth has stumbled in the public square,* **[Truth is but a memory]** *and honesty can’t enter.* **[Honesty is rejected]** *15Truth is missing; anyone turning from evil is plundered.*

**[Goodness, righteousness is shattered ”raped” ]**

**We need a Savior**

*The Lord looked and was upset at the absence of justice.  
16Seeing that there was no one,  
    and astonished that no one would intervene,  
    God’s arm brought victory,  
    upheld by righteousness,  
17    putting on righteousness as armor  
    and a helmet of salvation on his head,  
    putting on garments of vengeance,  
    and wrapping himself in a cloak of zeal.****18****God will repay according to their actions:  
    wrath to his foes, retribution to enemies,  
    retribution to the coastlands,****19****so those in the west will fear the Lord’s name,  
    and those in the east will fear God’s glory.  
It will come like a rushing river  
    that the Lord’s wind drives on.****20****A redeemer will come to Zion  
    and to those in Jacob who stop rebelling,  
    says the Lord.*

***21As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord.  
    My spirit, which is upon you,  
    and my words, which I have placed in your mouth  
    won’t depart from your mouth,  
    nor from the mouths of your descendants,  
    nor from the mouths of your descendants’ children,  
    says the Lord,  
    forever and always.***

**Understanding Guilt:**

“Our own conscience accuses us as we have the breath of God in us.” P.O. (spirit)

**Understanding Guilt: Chosen Sin**

**A Working STRUCTURE:**

**SIN** births condemnation which produces **SHAME** (a wounding of our conscience) that births **GUILT** (another wounding of our conscience) that puts up a shield of **ALIENATION** from God.

**FEAR** results from this new distance from God.

* Estrangement is produced in here.
* Guilt & Shame produce their own unhealthy mixture of emotional stimuli that evokes new and unwanted motivation to GET AWAY, BE GONE, DISAPPEAR….

Alienation creates “Why try” and we initiate a journey of “I can do it better myself”.

“A darkness” that lurks around us waiting to engulf us with every choice we make. P.O.

“It is essential we understand the goal of evil that beckons our free will to worship it.

So when we experience salvation, we can, with uncanny perception, recognize the shadow of evil trying to convince us that we are still its captive.” P.O.

**1 John 1:5-10**

***5****This is the message that we have heard from him and announce to you: “God is light and there is no darkness in him at all.”****6****If we claim, “We have fellowship with him,” and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully.****7****But if we live in the light in the same way as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.****8****If we claim, “We don’t have any sin,” we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.****9****But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong.****10****If we claim, “We have never sinned,” we make him a liar and his word is not in us.*

“It is essential we understand the goal of evil that beckons our free will to worship it.

So when we experience salvation, we can, with uncanny perception, recognize the shadow of evil trying to convince us that we are still its captive.” P.O.

**Using Scripture to Combat Chosen Sin:**

### Romans 8:1-17 Set free by the Spirit

**8**So now there isn’t any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2**The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. **3**God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. **4**He did this so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us. Now the way we live is based on the Spirit, not based on selfishness. **5**People whose lives are based on selfishness think about selfish things, but people whose lives are based on the Spirit think about things that are related to the Spirit. **6**The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. **7**So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn’t submit to God’s Law, because it can’t. **8**People who are self-centered aren’t able to please God.

**9**But you aren’t self-centered. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God’s Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn’t have the Spirit of Christ, they don’t belong to him. **10**If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of God’s righteousness, but the body is dead because of sin. **11**If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you.

**12**So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn’t an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. **13**If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. **14**All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons and daughters. **15**You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.” **16**The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children. **17**But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God’s heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

**Jeremiah 33:8**

***8****I will cleanse them of all the wrongdoing they committed against me, and I will forgive them for all of their guilt and rebellion.*

The second great and unsearchable thing God revealed to Jeremiah was pardon for sin:

Here the Scripture makes a distinction between “sin” and “sins.” God offers cleansing for sin (in the singular) and forgiveness for sins (in the plural). The difference is important. The Westminster *Confession of Faith* refers to it as the difference between “original sin” and “actual sins” (VII.ii-vi). The Scottish minister William Still (1911–1997) liked to call it the difference between the *root* and the *fruit* of sin.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1st – God would destroy all his enemies (gruesome prophecy)

3rd –Enduring peace.

**NOtes:**

**The Meaning of Man’s Will**

The term *free will* as applied to man is often glibly declared with little or no understanding of its meaning. There is actually no unified theory of man’s free will, but a variety of competing and often conflicting views about it.

The question of man’s free will is made more complicated by the fact that we must examine it in terms of how the will functioned before and after the fall of Adam. Most important is how the fall affected man’s moral choices.

Augustine gave the church a close analysis of the state of freedom that Adam enjoyed before the fall. His classic concept of freedom distinguished four possibilities. In Latin, they are:

1. *posse pecarre*—able to sin

2. *posse non pecarre*—able not to sin (or to remain free from sin)

3. *non posse pecarre*—unable to sin

4. *non posse*, *non pecarre*—unable not to sin

Augustine argued that before the fall, Adam possessed both the ability to sin (*posse pecarre*) and the ability to not sin (*posse non pecarre*). However, Adam lacked the exalted state of the inability to sin that God enjoys (*non posse pecarre*). God’s inability to sin is based not on an inner powerlessness to do what He wants, but rather on the fact that God has no inner desire to sin. Since the desire for sin is utterly absent from God, there is no reason for God to choose sin.

Before the fall, Adam did not have the moral perfection of God, but neither did he have the inability to refrain from sin (*non posse*, *non pecarre*). During his time of “probation” in the garden, he had the ability to sin and the ability not to sin. He chose to exercise the ability to sin and thus plunged the human race into ruin.

As a result, Adam’s first sin was passed on to all his descendants. Original sin refers not to the first sin but to God’s punishment of that first transgression. Because of the first sin, human nature fell into a morally corrupt state, itself partly a judgment of God. When we speak of original sin, we refer to the fallen human condition that reflects the judgment of God on the race.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Sin!

Man calls sin an accident; God calls it an abomination. Man calls sin a blunder; God calls it blindness. Man calls sin a chance; God call it a choice. Man calls sin a defect; God calls it a disease. Man calls sin an error; God calls it enmity. Man calls sin fascination; God calls it fatality. Man calls sin infirmity; God calls it fatality. Man calls sin infirmity; God calls it iniquity. Man calls sin luxury; God calls it lawlessness. Man calls sin a trifle; God calls it tragedy. Man calls sin a mistake; God calls it madness. Man calls sin a weakness; God calls it willfulness. There is only one remedy for sin—the precious blood of Christ, which was shed for the remission of sins on Calvary’s Cross.—Author Unknown[[5]](#footnote-5)

Theologians distinguish between two different kinds of guilt, which come from two different kinds of sin. First there is the guilt of original sin, *Sin* in the upper case. ‘Original sin’ refers to the guilt every person shares for the sin of Adam. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes explains it well:

The doctrine of original sin postulates that the first sin of the first man, Adam, which was the occasion of the fall, is in a certain sense the sin of all mankind, and that accordingly human nature is infected by the corruption of that sin and the human race as a whole bears its guilt[[6]](#footnote-6)

**2. Body of Christ—Solidarity of Saints (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)**

The Church of Jesus Christ is an organism; we are built up into Him, baptised by one Spirit into one body. Churchianity is an organisation; **Christianity is an organism.** Organisation is an enormous benefit until it is mistaken for the life. God has no concern about our organisations. When their purpose is finished He allows them to be swept aside, and if we are attached to the organisation, we shall go with it. Organisation is a great necessity, but not an end in itself, and to live for any organisation is a spiritual disaster. To-day we are hearing the crash of civilisation and the crash of organisations everywhere.

Our word “Church” is connected with civilised organisations of religious people; our Lord’s attitude to the Church is different. He says it is composed of those who have had a personal revelation from God as to Who Jesus Christ is, and have made a public declaration of the same (Matthew 16:13-20).

The great conception to-day is not our being merged into God, but God being merged into us. The Christian line of things is that we are brought into union with God by love, not that we are absorbed into God. Jesus Christ maintains that this is to be brought about on the basis of His Redemption alone. Mysticism says it can be brought about by a higher refinement of nature. The stupendous difference between the religion of Jesus Christ and every other religion under heaven is that His religion is one which brings help to the bottom of hell, not a religion that can deal only with what is fine and pure.

***(a) Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)***

**Sin is a fundamental relationship underneath: sin is not wrongdoing, it is wrong *being,* deliberate and emphatic independence of God.** God, on the ground of Redemption, has undertaken the responsibility for sin and for the removal of it, and Jesus Christ claims that He can plant in any of us His own heredity, which will re-make us into the new order of humanity. If the human race apart from Jesus Christ is all right, then the Redemption of Jesus Christ is a useless waste.

**The revelation is not that Jesus Christ was punished for our sins, but that He was made to be *sin*.** “Him who knew no sin” was made to be sin, that by His identification with it and removal of it, we might become what He was. Jesus Christ became identified not only with the disposition of sin, but with the very “body” of sin. He had not the disposition of sin in Himself, and no connection with the body of sin, but, “Him who knew no sin, He made *to be sin*.” Jesus Christ went straight through identification with sin so that every man and woman on earth might be freed from sin by His atonement. He went through the depths of damnation and came out more than conqueror; consequently every one of us who is willing to be identified with Him is freed from the disposition of sin, freed from the connection with the body of sin, and can come out more than conqueror too because of what Jesus Christ has done. The revelation is not that Jesus Christ took on Him our fleshly sins—a man stands or falls by his own silly weaknesses—but that He took on Him the heredity of sin†. God Himself became sin, and removed sin; no man can touch that. God made His own Son to be sin that He might make the sinner a saint. God Almighty took the problem of the sin of the world on His own shoulders, and it made Him stoop; He rehabilitated the whole human race; that is, He put the human race back to where He designed it to be, and any one of us in our actual conditions can enter into union with God on the ground of Jesus Christ’s Redemption. God has put the whole human race on the basis of Redemption. A man cannot redeem himself; Redemption is absolutely finished and complete; its reference to individual men is a question of their individual action.

***(b) Repentance (Acts 2:37-40)***

There is a difference between a man altering his life, and repenting. A man may have lived a bad life and suddenly stop being bad, not because he has repented, but because he is like an exhausted volcano; the fact that he has become good is no sign that he is a Christian. The bed-rock of Christianity is repentance. Repentance means that I estimate exactly what I am in God’s sight, and I am sorry for it, and on the basis of Redemption I become the opposite. The only repentant man is the holy man. Any man who knows himself knows that he cannot be holy, therefore if ever he is holy, it will be because God has “shipped” something into him, and he begins to bring forth the fruits of repentance. The disposition of the Son of God can only enter my life by the road of repentance. Strictly speaking, repentance is a gift of God; no man can repent when he chooses. A man can be remorseful when he chooses, but remorse is something less than repentance. When God handles the wrong in a man it makes him turn to God and his life becomes a sacrament of experimental repentance.

***(c) Regeneration (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)***

When I come to the end of myself and my self-sufficiency, in my destitution I can hear Jesus Christ say, Ask, and I will give you Holy Spirit. “Holy Spirit” is the experimental name for eternal life working in human beings here and now. Jesus Christ said, You have not that life in yourselves, and you cannot have it unless you get it through Me. He is referring to “Holy Spirit” life which by His resurrection He can impart. The Holy Spirit will take my spirit, soul and body and bring them back into communion with God, and lead me into identification with the death of Jesus Christ, until I know experimentally that my old disposition, my right to myself, is crucified with Him†, and my human nature is now free to obey the commands of God.

The doctrine of substitution is twofold. Not only is Jesus Christ identified with my sin, but I am identified with Him so that His ruling disposition is in me, and the moral transaction on my part is agreement with God’s verdict on sin in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Redemption means that God through Jesus Christ can take the most miserable wreck and turn him into a son of God. As long as a man has his morality well within his own grasp, Jesus Christ does not amount to anything to him, but when a man gets to his wits’ end by agony and says involuntarily, “My God, what am I up against? there is something underneath I never knew was there,” he begins to pay attention to what Jesus Christ says. A moral preparation is necessary before we can believe; truth is a moral vision, and does not exist for a man until he sees it. There is a frontier outside which Jesus Christ does not tell; but when once we get over that frontier, He becomes all in all. God takes us through circumstances until we enter the moral frontiers where Jesus Christ tells.

When you come to your wits’ end, remember there is a way out, viz., personal relationship to God through the Redemption of Jesus Christ. *s[[7]](#footnote-7)*

**11. God’s Spirit in God’s children**

**8:1–39**

Romans 8 is without doubt one of the best-known, best-loved chapters of the Bible. If in Romans 7 Paul has been preoccupied with the place of the law, in Romans 8 his preoccupation is with the work of the Spirit. In chapter 7 the law and its synonyms were mentioned some thirty-one times, but the Holy Spirit only once (6), whereas in the first twenty-seven verses of chapter 8 he is referred to nineteen times by name. The essential contrast which Paul paints is between the weakness of the law and the power of the Spirit. For over against indwelling sin, which is the reason the law is unable to help us in our moral struggle (7:17, 20), Paul now sets the indwelling Spirit, who is both our liberator now from ‘the law of sin and death’ (8:2) and the guarantee of resurrection and eternal glory in the end (8:11, 17, 23). Thus the Christian life is essentially life in the Spirit, that is to say, a life which is animated, sustained, directed and enriched by the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit true Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, indeed impossible.

In handling the topic of the Holy Spirit, however, the apostle relates it to his other overarching theme in this chapter, namely the absolute security of the children of God. According to Charles Hodge, ‘the whole chapter is a series of arguments, most beautifully arranged, in support of this one point’. And Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones agrees with him. ‘I make bold to assert that the great theme of chapter 8 is not sanctification … The great theme is the security of the Christian.’ At the same time, the two topics are intimately related. For possession of the Spirit is the hallmark of those who truly belong to Christ (9); his inner witness assures us that we are God’s children and therefore his heirs (15–17); and his presence in us is the firstfruits of our inheritance, pledging the final harvest (23).

The chapter divides itself naturally into three sections. The first depicts the varied ministry of God’s Spirit in liberating, indwelling, sanctifying, leading, witnessing to and finally resurrecting the children of God (1–17). The second treats the future glory of God’s children, portrayed as a final freedom in which the whole creation will share (18–27). And thirdly Paul emphasizes the steadfastness of God’s love, as he works in all things for the good of those who love him and promises that nothing will ever be allowed to separate us from his love (28–39). The apostle’s perspective stretches our mind, as he ranges from eternity to eternity. He begins with ‘no condemnation’ (1) and ends with ‘no separation’ (39), in both cases for those who are ‘in Christ Jesus’.

**1. The ministry of God’s Spirit (1–17)**

The word *Therefore*, with which the chapter begins, indicates that the apostle is summing up, or expressing an interim conclusion. The deduction he draws, however, does not seem to come from chapter 7 alone, but from his whole argument thus far, and specially from what he has written in chapters 3, 4 and 5 about salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ. And the word *now* emphasizes that this salvation is already ours if we are in Christ, as opposed to being in Adam (5:12ff.).

The first blessing of salvation is expressed in the words *no condemnation*, which are equivalent to ‘justification’. In fact, the opening statements of Romans 5 and Romans 8 complement each other. Chapter 5 begins with the positive declaration: ‘Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Chapter 8 begins with the negative counterpart: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. Paul will almost immediately go on to explain that our not being condemned is due to God’s action of condemning our sin in Christ (3). Then later in the chapter he will argue that nobody can accuse us because God has justified us (33), and that nobody can condemn us because Christ died, was raised, is at God’s right hand and is interceding for us (34). In other words, our justification, together with its corresponding truth of ‘no condemnation’, is securely grounded in what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ.

*a. The freedom of the Spirit (2–4)*

The second privilege of salvation is expressed in the next statement: *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death* (2). Thus a certain ‘liberation’ joins ‘no condemnation’ as the two great blessings which are ours if we are ‘in Christ Jesus’ (a clause which is applied to both in the Greek of verses 1 and 2). Moreover, these two blessings are linked by the conjunction *because*, indicating that our liberation is the basis of our justification. It is because we have been liberated that no condemnation can overtake us.

From what, then, have we been set free? Paul replies: *from the law of sin and death*. The context seems to demand that this is a description of God’s law, of Torah. For a major emphasis of Romans 7 has been on the relation between the law on the one hand and sin and death on the other. True, Paul was at pains to stress that the law is not itself sinful, yet he added that it reveals, provokes and condemns sin (7:7–9). True again, he stressed that the law does not ‘become death’ to people; yet it had ‘produced death’ in him (7:13). So, shocking as it may sound, God’s holy law could be called *the law of sin and death* because it occasioned both. In this case, to be liberated from the law of sin and death through Christ is to be no longer ‘under the law’, that is, to give up looking to the law for either justification or sanctification.

This liberation has been Paul’s own experience. It is noteworthy that verse 2 contains the only use in Romans 8 of the first person singular (*set me free*), which has been such a prominent feature of Romans 7. By this Paul is indicating that he has himself been delivered, in Christ and through the Spirit, from the law and so from the humiliating situation with which he identified himself at the end of Romans 7.

The means of our liberation Paul calls *the law of the Spirit of life* (2) or ‘the life-giving law of the Spirit’ (reb). At first sight it seems strange that law should liberate us from law, especially when commentators are determined to give ‘law’ the same meaning in both expressions. Some take ‘law’ as meaning ‘principle’ or ‘power’, and translate ‘the power of the Spirit of life’ which frees us from ‘the power of sin and death’, but both expressions are then too imprecise to be meaningful. Professor Dunn argues that in both cases the law is Torah, and that Paul is reaffirming ‘the two-sidedness of the law’ as a law of both death and life, that is, of sin and death belonging to the old epoch, and of Spirit and life belonging to the new. But it is questionable whether the Romans would have grasped this subtlety.

The alternative is to understand ‘the law of the Spirit of life’ as describing the gospel, just as Paul calls it elsewhere ‘the ministry of the Spirit’.5 This makes the best sense, as it is certainly the gospel which has freed us from the law and its curse, and the message of life in the Spirit from the slavery of sin and death.

How the gospel liberates us from the law is elaborated in verses 3–4. The first and fundamental truth which Paul declares is that God has taken the initiative to do *what the law* (even though it was his own law) *was powerless to do*. The law could neither justify nor sanctify. Why not? Because *it was weakened by the sinful nature* (3a), or ‘because human weakness robbed it of all potency’ (reb). That is, the law’s impotence is not intrinsic. It is not in itself but in us, in our ‘flesh’ (*sarx*), our fallen selfish nature (*cf.* 7:14–20). So then, what the sin-weakened law could not do, *God did*. He made provision for both our justification and our sanctification. First, he sent his Son, whose incarnation and atonement are alluded to in verse 3, and then he gave us his Spirit through whose indwelling power we are enabled to fulfil the law’s requirement, which is mentioned in verse 4 and expanded in the following paragraph. Thus God justifies us through his Son and sanctifies us through his Spirit. The plan of salvation is essentially trinitarian. For God’s way of justification is not law but grace (through the death of Christ), and his way of sanctification is not law but the Spirit (through his indwelling).

What *God did* Paul unfolds in five expressions. First came the *sending* of *his own Son*. The word ‘sending’ does not necessarily imply the Son’s pre-existence, since God is also said to have ‘sent’ his prophets in the Old Testament and his apostles in the New, who of course were not pre-existent. Nevertheless, the statement that it was *his own Son* whom he sent may well be intended to indicate that he had enjoyed a prior life of intimacy with the Father; it certainly expresses the Father’s sacrificial love in sending him (*cf.* 5:8, 10 and 8:32).

Secondly, the sending of the divine Son involved his becoming incarnate, a human being, which is expressed by the words *in the likeness of sinful man*, or better ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (rsv). This somewhat roundabout phrase, which has puzzled commentators mainly because of its use of ‘likeness’, was doubtless intended to combat false views of the incarnation. That is, the Son came neither ‘in the likeness of flesh’, only seeming to be human, as the Docetists taught, for his humanity was real;7 nor ‘in sinful flesh’, assuming a fallen nature, for his humanity was sinless, but ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’, because his humanity was both real and sinless simultaneously.

Thirdly, God sent his Son *to be a sin offering*. The Greek expression *peri hamartias* (literally, ‘concerning sin’) could be a general statement that he came ‘for sin’ (av, rsv) or ‘to deal with sin’ (reb), without any indication how he did it. But probably the reference is specifically to the sacrificial nature of his death. For *peri hamartias* was the usual lxx rendering of the Hebrew for ‘sin offering’ in Leviticus and Numbers, and should clearly be translated ‘sin offering’ in Hebrews 10:6, 8 and 13:11. And since the sin offering was prescribed specially for the atoning of ‘unwilling sins’, which is exactly what the sins of Romans 7 are (‘I do what I do not want to do’, 20), Tom Wright concludes, ‘There can no longer be any room for doubt that when Paul wrote *kai peri hamartias* he meant the words to carry their regular biblical overtones, *i.e.* “and as a sin offering” ’. In any case, ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ is clearly an allusion to the incarnation, and ‘to be a sin offering’ to the atonement.

Fourthly, *God … condemned sin in sinful man* (3, literally, ‘in the flesh’), that is, in the flesh or humanity of Jesus, real and sinless, although made sin with our sins. God judged our sins in the sinless humanity of his Son, who bore them in our place. Friedrich Büchsel points out that ‘when it [*sc. katakrinein*, to condemn] refers to human judgment there is a clear distinction between the condemnation and its execution’. But in the case of the divine *katakrinein* ‘the two can be seen as one’. Hence in Romans 8:3 ‘the pronouncement and execution of the sentence’ are both included. The law condemns sin, in the sense of expressing disapproval of it, but when God condemned sin in his Son, his judgment fell upon it in him. As Charles Cranfield puts it, ‘for those who are in Christ Jesus … there is no divine condemnation, since the condemnation they deserve has already been fully borne for them by him’.

Fifthly, Paul clarifies the ultimate reason God sent his own Son and condemned our sin in him. It was *in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit* (4). One might have expected Paul to write that ‘God condemned sin in Jesus in order that we might escape the condemnation’, that is, ‘in order that we might be justified’. Indeed, this was the immediate purpose of the sin-bearing death of God’s Son. Consequently, most of the early Fathers, the Reformers and subsequent Reformed commentators seem to have interpreted Paul’s statement of verse 4 in the same way. Hodge, for example, insists that verse 4 ‘must be understood of justification, and not of sanctification. He condemned sin, in order that the demands of the law might be satisfied’, the law’s main demand being the sentence of death for sin. Yet if God’s purpose in sending his Son was limited to our justification, the addition of the final clause (*who … live … according to the Spirit*) would be a *non sequitur*.

It is this phrase which directs our attention to law-abiding Christian behaviour as the ultimate purpose of God’s action through Christ. In this case the law’s *dikaiōma* or ‘just requirement’ (singular, not plural ‘requirements’ as in niv) refers to the commandments of the moral law viewed as a whole, which God wants to be ‘fulfilled’ (*i.e.* ‘obeyed’, not ‘satisfied’) in his people. For Jesus had himself spoken of fulfilling the law, and Paul will write later of neighbour love as the chief ‘fulfilment of the law’ (13:8–10). Moreover, the law can be fulfilled only in those ‘who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’ (rsv). The flesh renders the law impotent, the Spirit empowers us to obey it. This is not perfectionism; it is simply to say that obedience is a necessary and possible aspect of Christian discipleship. Although the law cannot secure this obedience, the Spirit can.

Some modern scholars find Paul hopelessly confused, even self-contradictory, since he writes of both the abolition and the fulfilment of the law, of our being both released from it and committed to it, our discharge and our obligation being both attributable to Christ’s death (7:4; 8:3–4)! The most outspoken critic of Paul’s supposed inconsistency is Heikki Räisänen. He rejects all eulogies of Paul which depict him as a profound, logical, consistent theologian. Instead, ‘contradictions and tensions have to be *accepted* as *constant* features of Paul’s theology of the law’. In particular, ‘we find two conflicting lines of thought in Paul’s theology of the law. Paul asserts both the abolition of the law and also its permanently normative character’.18 Indeed, ‘Paul’s thought on the law is full of difficulties and inconsistencies’, for (Dr Räisänen presses the question) how could a divine institution be abolished or abrogated?20 But I fail to see any inconsistency in Paul’s declarations that, because the law is unable to justify or sanctify us, it has been abolished in those roles, whereas the Spirit can enable us to fulfil or keep the moral law. This was certainly the prophetic expectation. Through Ezekiel God promised, ‘I will put my Spirit in you’, and through Jeremiah, ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.’ These promises are synonymous. When God puts his Spirit in our hearts, he writes his law there.

Verse 4 is of great importance for our understanding of Christian holiness. First, holiness is the ultimate purpose of the incarnation and the atonement. The end God had in view when sending his Son was not our justification only, through freedom from the condemnation of the law, but also our holiness, through obedience to the commandments of the law. Secondly, holiness consists in fulfilling the just requirement of the law. This is the final answer to antinomians and adherents of the so-called ‘new morality’. The moral law has not been abolished for us; it is to be fulfilled in us. Although law-obedience is not the *ground* of our justification (it is in this sense that we are ‘not under law but under grace’), it is the fruit of it and the very meaning of sanctification. Holiness is Christlikeness, and Christlikeness is fulfilling the righteousness of the law. Thirdly, holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit. Romans 7 insists that we cannot keep the law because of our indwelling ‘flesh’; Romans 8:4 insists that we can and must because of the indwelling Spirit.

Looking back over the whole passage which runs from 7:1 to 8:4, the continuing place of the law in the Christian life should be clear. Our freedom from the law (proclaimed for instance in 7:4, 6 and 8:2) is not freedom to disobey it. On the contrary the law-obedience of the people of God is so important to God that he sent his Son to die for us and his Spirit to live in us, in order to secure it. Holiness is the fruit of trinitarian grace, of the Father sending his Son into the world and his Spirit into our hearts.

*b. The mind of the Spirit (5–8)*

Paul has asserted that the only people in whom the law’s righteous requirement can be fulfilled are those who live not *kata sarka* (according to flesh) but *kata pneuma* (according to spirit or better the Spirit), that is, those who follow the promptings and surrender to the control of the Spirit rather than the flesh. It is this antithesis between flesh and Spirit which Paul now develops in verses 5–8. Implicitly or explicitly, it recurs in every verse. Paul’s purpose is to explain why obedience to the law is possible only to those who walk according to the Spirit.

We begin with some definitions. By *sarx* (flesh) Paul means neither the soft muscular tissue which covers our bony skeleton, nor our bodily instincts and appetites, but rather the whole of our humanness viewed as corrupt and unredeemed, ‘our fallen, egocentric human nature’, or more briefly ‘the sin-dominated self’. By *pneuma* (spirit) in this passage Paul means not the higher aspect of our humanness viewed as ‘spiritual’ (although in verse 16 he will refer to our human spirit), but rather the personal Holy Spirit himself who now not only regenerates but also indwells the people of God. This tension between ‘flesh’ and ‘Spirit’ is reminiscent of Galatians 5:16–26, where they are in irreconcilable conflict with each other. Here Paul concentrates on the ‘mind’, or (as we would say) ‘mindset’, of those who are characterized by either *sarx* or *pneuma*.

First, our mindset expresses our basic nature as Christians or non-Christians. On the one hand, there are *those who live according to the sinful nature*. They are not now those who ‘walk’ according to it (4, literally) but those who simply ‘are’ like this (5, literally). These people *have their minds set on what that nature desires*, whereas *those who live in accordance with the Spirit* (literally, ‘those according to the Spirit’—there is no verb) *have their minds set on what the Spirit desires* (5). The meaning surely is not that people are like this because they think like this, although that is partly true, but that they think like this because they are like this. The expressions are descriptive. In both cases their nature determines their mindset. Moreover, since the flesh is our twisted human nature, its desires are all those things which pander to our ungodly self-centredness. Since the Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself, however, his desires are all those things which please him, who loves above all else to glorify Christ, that is, to show Christ to us and form Christ in us.

Now to ‘set the mind’ (*phroneō*) on the desires of *sarx* or *pneuma* is to make them the ‘absorbing objects of thought, interest, affection and purpose’. It is a question of what preoccupies us, of the ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us, of how we spend our time and our energies, of what we concentrate on and give ourselves up to. All this is determined by who we are, whether we are still ‘in the flesh’ or are now by new birth ‘in the Spirit’.

Secondly, our mindset has eternal consequences. *The mind of sinful man* (literally, ‘of the flesh’) *is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit* (literally, ‘of the Spirit’) *is life and peace* (6). That is, the mindset of flesh-dominated people is already one of spiritual death and leads inevitably to eternal death, for it alienates them from God and renders fellowship with him impossible in either this world or the next. The mindset of Spirit-dominated people, however, entails life and peace. On the one hand they are ‘alive to God’ (6:11), alert to spiritual realities, and thirsty for God like nomads in the desert, like deer panting for streams.26 On the other hand, they have peace with God (5:1), peace with their neighbour (12:16), and peace within, enjoying an inner integration or harmony. We would surely pursue holiness with greater eagerness if we were convinced that it is the way of life and peace.

Thirdly, our mindset concerns our fundamental attitude to God. The reason the mind of the flesh is death is that it *is hostile to God*, cherishing a deep-seated animosity against him. It is antagonistic to his name, kingdom and will, to his day, his people and his word, to his Son, his Spirit and his glory. In particular, Paul singles out his moral standards. In contrast to the regenerate who ‘delight’ in God’s law (7:22), the unregenerate mind *does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so* (7), which explains why those who live according to the flesh cannot fulfil the law’s righteous requirement (4). Finally, *those* who are *controlled by the sinful nature* (*sarx*), literally those who are ‘in flesh’ (*en sarki*) or unregenerate, lacking the Spirit of God, *cannot please God* (8). They *cannot* please him (8) because they *cannot* submit to his law (7), whereas, it is implied, those who are in the Spirit set themselves to please him in everything, even to do so ‘more and more’.

To sum up, here are two categories of people (the unregenerate who are ‘in the flesh’ and the regenerate who are ‘in the Spirit’), who have two perspectives or mindsets (‘the mind of the flesh’ and ‘the mind of the Spirit’), which lead to two patterns of conduct (living according to the flesh or the Spirit), and result in two spiritual states (death or life, enmity or peace). Thus our mind, where we set it and how we occupy it, plays a key role in both our present conduct and our final destiny.

*c. The indwelling of the Spirit (9–13)*

In verse 9 Paul applies to his readers personally the truths he has so far been expounding in general terms. Having been writing in the third person plural, he now shifts to the second person and addresses his readers directly. *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit*. ‘You are controlled by’ is too strong a translation of the straightforward ‘you are in’ the flesh or the Spirit, for Paul immediately clarifies what he means by adding *if the Spirit of God lives in you* (9a). Thus you are in the Spirit if the Spirit is in you, for the same truth can be expressed in terms either of our personal relationship to the Spirit or of his dwelling in us, the latter denoting ‘a settled permanent penetrative influence’. This also means, Paul continues, that *if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ* (9b).

Verse 9 is of great importance in relation to our doctrine of the Holy Spirit for at least two reasons. First, it teaches that the hallmark of the authentic believer is the possession or indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Indwelling sin (7:17, 20) is the lot of all the children of Adam; the privilege of the children of God is to have the indwelling Spirit to fight and subdue indwelling sin. As Jesus had promised, ‘he lives with you and will be in you’. Now in fulfilment of this promise every true Christian has received the Spirit, so that our body has become ‘a temple of the Holy Spirit’ in which he dwells. Conversely, if we do not have Christ’s Spirit in us, we do not belong to Christ at all. This makes it plain that the gift of the Spirit is an initial and universal blessing, received when we first repent and believe in Jesus. Of course there may be many further and richer experiences of the Spirit, and many fresh anointings of the Spirit for special tasks, but the personal indwelling of the Spirit is every believer’s privilege from the beginning. To know Christ and to have the Spirit are one. Bishop Handley Moule was wise to write that ‘there is no *separable* “Gospel of the Spirit”. Not for a moment are we to advance, as it were, from the Lord Jesus Christ to a higher or deeper region, ruled by the Holy Ghost.’

Secondly, verse 9 teaches that several different expressions are synonyms. We have already seen that being in the Spirit is the same as having the Spirit in us. Now we note that ‘the Spirit of God’ is also called ‘the Spirit of Christ’, and that to have the Spirit of Christ in us (9b) is to have Christ in us (10a). This is not to confuse the persons of the Trinity by identifying the Father with the Son or the Son with the Spirit. It is rather to emphasize that, although they are eternally distinct in their personal modes of being, they also share the same divine essence and will. In consequence, they are inseparable. What the Father does he does through the Son, and what the Son does he does through the Spirit. Indeed, wherever each is, there are the others also.

After affirming that to have the Spirit in us is the distinguishing mark of Christ’s people, Paul proceeds to indicate two major consequences of his indwelling. The first he describes in terms of ‘life’ (10–11) and the second in terms of ‘debt’ or obligation (12–13). Both verse 10 and verse 11 begin with an ‘if’ clause relating to this indwelling: *But if Christ is in you* … (10), *And if the Spirit … is living in you* (11). These two ‘ifs’ do not express any doubt about the fact of the indwelling (they could be paraphrased, ‘if, as indeed is the case’), but they point to its results.

The exact meaning of verse 10 is disputed: *your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness*. Two main questions are raised. The first is: what death of the body is being referred to? Some suggest that *your body* (*sōma*) simply means ‘you’, and that you are *dead* in the sense that you have died with Christ, as explained in 6:2ff. Ernst Käsemann, for example, goes so far as to state that ‘the only possible reference is to the death of the body of sin effected in baptism’. But the reluctance to allow ‘body’ to mean our material body is strange, especially in a context which goes on to speak of its resurrection (11), and the body can hardly be already dead since the apostle goes on to write of the need to put its misdeeds to death (13). It is, therefore, much better to understand ‘dead’ as indicating ‘mortal’, that is, subject to death and destined for it. This would fit in with Paul’s references in Romans to our ‘mortal bodies’ (*e.g.* 6:12; 8:11b) and elsewhere to our physical decaying and dying. It is also true to experience. As Dr Lloyd-Jones has put it, writing as a physician as well as a pastor: ‘The moment we enter into this world and begin to live, we also begin to die. Your first breath is one of the last you will ever take!… the principle of decay, leading to death, is in every one of us.’35

At the same time, in the midst of our physical mortality, our *spirit is alive*, for we have been ‘quickened’ or made alive in Christ (*cf.* 6:11, 13, 23). What, however, is the cause of this double condition, namely a dying body and a living spirit? The answer lies in the repeated ‘because’, which attributes death to sin and life to righteousness. Since Paul has already made this attribution in his Adam-Christ parallelism in chapter 5, he must surely be saying that our bodies became mortal because of Adam’s sin (‘to dust you will return’), whereas our spirits are alive because of Christ’s righteousness (5:15–18, 21), that is, because of the righteous standing he has secured for us.

The ultimate destiny of our body is not death, however, but resurrection. To this further truth Paul now proceeds in verse 11. Our bodies are not yet redeemed (23), but they will be, and we are eagerly awaiting this event. How can we be so sure about it? Because of the nature of the indwelling Spirit. He is not only ‘the Spirit of life’ (2), but the Spirit of resurrection. For he is *the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead*. Therefore the God whose Spirit he is, namely *he who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to your mortal bodies*, and will do it *through his Spirit, who lives in you* (11). We note this further unselfconscious allusion to the three persons of the Trinity—the resurrecting Father, the resurrected Son and the Spirit of resurrection. Further, Christ’s resurrection is the pledge and the pattern of ours. The same Spirit who raised him will also raise us. The same Spirit who gives life to our spirits (10) will also give life to our bodies (11).

This does not mean that our dead bodies will be revivified or resuscitated, and so restored to their present material existence, only to die again. No, resurrection includes transformation, the raising and changing of our body into a new and glorious vehicle of our personality, and its liberation from all frailty, disease, pain, decay and death. It is ‘not that the spirit is to be freed from the body—as many, under the influence of the Greek way of thinking, have held—but rather that the Spirit will give life to the body’.

‘Wonderful’, writes Bishop Handley Moule, ‘is this deep characteristic of the Scripture: its gospel for the body. In Christ, the body is seen to be something far different from the mere clog, or prison, or chrysalis, of the soul. It is its destined implement, may we not say its mighty wings in prospect, for the life of glory.’ Already we express our personality through our body, especially by speech, but also by posture and gesture, by a look in our eyes or an expression on our face. We call it ‘body language’. But the language which our present body speaks is imperfect; we easily miscommunicate. Our new body will not have this limitation, however. There will be a perfect correspondence between message and medium, between what we want to communicate and how we do so. The resurrection body will be the perfect vehicle of our redeemed personality.

We come now to the second consequence of the dwelling in us of God or Christ through the Spirit. The first was life; the second is a debt or obligation. *Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation* (12), or literally ‘we are debtors’ (av, rsv). What is this debt? It is not now to share the gospel with the world (as in 1:14), but to live a righteous life. We have no obligation *to the sinful nature* (*sarx*) *to live according to it* (12). It has no claim on us. We owe it nothing. Our obligation is rather (this is inferred, since Paul does not complete the expected antithesis) to the Spirit, to live according to his desires and dictates.

Paul’s argument seems to be this: if the indwelling Spirit has given us life, which he has (*your spirit is alive*, 10), we cannot possibly live according to the flesh, since that way lies death. How can we possess life and court death simultaneously? Such an inconsistency between who we are and how we behave is unthinkable, even ludicrous. No, we are in debt to the indwelling Spirit of life to live out our God-given life and to put to death everything which threatens it or is incompatible with it.

Verse 13 sets the option before us as a solemn life-and-death alternative, which is made the more impressive by Paul’s renewed resort to direct address. *For if you live according to the sinful nature* (which he has just declared in verse 12 not to be a Christian obligation), *you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live* (13). That is, there is a kind of life which leads to death, and there is a kind of death which leads to life. Verse 13 thus becomes a very significant verse on the neglected topic of ‘mortification’ (the process of putting to death the body’s misdeeds). It clarifies at least three truths about it.

First, what is mortification? Mortification is neither masochism (taking pleasure in self-inflicted pain), nor asceticism (resenting and rejecting the fact that we have bodies and natural bodily appetites). It is rather a clear-sighted recognition of evil as evil, leading to such a decisive and radical repudiation of it that no imagery can do it justice except ‘putting to death’. In fact, the verb Paul uses normally means to ‘kill someone, hand someone over to be killed, especially of the death sentence and its execution’ (BAGD on *thanatoō*). Elsewhere the apostle has called it a crucifixion of our fallen nature, with all its passions and desires.41 And this teaching is Paul’s elaboration of Jesus’ own summons: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’ Since the Romans compelled a condemned criminal to carry his cross to the site of crucifixion, to carry our cross is symbolic of following Jesus to the place of execution. And what we are to *put to death* there, Paul explains, is *the misdeeds of the body*, that is, every use of our body (our eyes, ears, mouth, hands or feet) which serves ourselves instead of God and other people. Some scholars, doubtless anxious to avoid the dualism which regards the body itself as evil, suggest that by *sōma* (the body) Paul really means *sarx* (the flesh, or sinful nature), and one or two manuscripts do contain this word. Thus Charles Cranfield renders the phrase ‘the activities and schemings of the sinful flesh, of human self-centredness and self-assertion’. But it seems better to retain *sōma*, to bear in mind that the word for *misdeeds* is actually neutral (*praxeis*, deeds or actions), and to allow the context to determine whether they are good or (as here) evil.

Secondly, how does mortification take place? We note at once that it is something that we have to do. It is not a question of dying or of being put to death, but of putting to death. In the work of mortification we are not passive, waiting for it to be done to us or for us. On the contrary, we are responsible for putting evil to death. True, Paul immediately adds that we can *put to death the misdeeds of the body* only *by the Spirit*, by his agency and power. For only he can give us the desire, determination and discipline to reject evil. Nevertheless, it is we who must take the initiative to act. Negatively, we must totally repudiate everything we know to be wrong, and not even ‘think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature’ (13:14). This is not an unhealthy form of repression, pretending that evil does not exist in us and refusing to face it. It is the opposite. We have to ‘pull it out, look at it, denounce it, hate it for what it is; then you have really dealt with it’. Or, as Jesus graphically expressed it, we must gouge out our offending eye and cut off our offending hand or foot. That is, if temptation comes to us through what we see, handle or visit, then we must be ruthless in not looking, not touching, not going, and so in controlling the very approaches of sin. Positively, we are to set our minds on the things the Spirit desires (5), set our hearts on things above, and occupy our thoughts with what is noble, right, pure and lovely.47 In this way ‘mortification’ (putting evil to death) and ‘aspiration’ (hungering and thirsting for what is good) are counterparts. Both verbs (verse 5, ‘set their minds’, and verse 13, ‘put to death’) are in the present tense, for they describe attitudes and activities which should be continuous, involving taking up the cross every day and setting our minds on the things of the Spirit every day.

Thirdly, why should we practise mortification? It sounds an unpleasant, uncongenial, austere and even painful business. It runs counter to our natural tendency to soft and lazy self-indulgence. If we are to engage in it, we shall need strong motives. One is, as we have seen, that *we have an obligation* (12) to the indwelling Spirit of life. Another, on which Paul now insists, is that the death of mortification is the only road to life. Verse 13 contains the most marvellous promise, which is expressed in the single Greek verb *zēsesthe*, *you will live*. Paul is not now contradicting himself. Having called eternal life a free and undeserved gift (6:23), he is not now making it a reward for self-denial. Nor by ‘life’ does he seem to be referring to the life of the world to come. He seems to be alluding to the life of God’s children, who are led by his Spirit and assured of his fatherly love, to which he comes in the next verses (14ff.). This rich, abundant, satisfying life, he is saying, can be enjoyed only by those who put their misdeeds to death. Even the pain of mortification is worth while if it opens the door to fulness of life.

This is one of several ways in which the radical principle of ‘life through death’ lies at the heart of the gospel. According to Romans 6 it is only by dying with Christ to sin, its penalty thereby paid, that we rise to a new life of forgiveness and freedom. According to Romans 8 it is only by putting our evil deeds to death that we experience the full life of God’s children. So we need to redefine both life and death. What the world calls life (a desirable self-indulgence) leads to alienation from God which in reality is death, whereas the putting to death of all perceived evil within us, which the world sees as an undesirable self-abnegation, is in reality the way to authentic life.

*d. The witness of the Spirit (14–17)*

What is immediately noteworthy about this paragraph is that in each of its four verses God’s people are designated his *children* or *sons* (which of course includes ‘daughters’), and that in each this privileged status is related to the work of the Holy Spirit. Only in verse 16 is it specifically said that the Spirit *testifies … that we are God’s children*. Yet the whole paragraph concerns the witness he bears us, that is, the assurance he gives us. The question is: precisely how is the Spirit’s witness borne? Paul assembles four pieces of evidence. First, the Spirit leads us into holiness (verse 14 being linked to verse 13 by the conjunction *because*). Secondly, in our relationship to God he replaces fear with freedom (15a). Thirdly, in our prayers he prompts us to call God ‘Father’ (15b–16). Fourthly, he is the firstfruits of our heavenly inheritance (17, 23). Thus radical holiness, fearless freedom, filial prayerfulness and the hope of glory are four characteristics of the children of God who are indwelt and led by the Spirit of God. It is by these evidences that he witnesses to us that we are God’s children.

First, the Spirit leads us into holiness (14). It is somewhat artificial to begin a new sub-section at verse 14, as we have done, since the topic is still the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Yet verse 14 clarifies verse 13 (*because*) by changing the imagery. Those who through the Spirit put the body’s misdeeds to death (13b) are now called *those who are led by the Spirit* (14a), while those who have entered into fulness of life (13c) are now called *sons of God* (14b). Both clarifications are important.

To begin with, the kind of ‘leading’ by the Spirit which is the characteristic experience of God’s children is evidently more specific than it sounds. For it consists of, or at least includes as one of its most substantial features, the prompting and strengthening which enable them to put to death the body’s misdeeds. ‘The daily, hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit.’

Other commentators describe God’s children as ‘driven’ by the Spirit. For example, Godet writes that there is here ‘something like a notion of holy violence; the Spirit drags the man [*sc.* the person] where the flesh would fain not go’. Professor Käsemann also speaks of being ‘driven by the Spirit’, and interprets it of charismatic ‘enthusiasts’ who are ‘carried away’ by the Spirit.51 Professor Dunn follows him, claiming that ‘the most natural sense’ is that ‘of being constrained by a compelling force, of surrendering to an overmastering compulsion’. Yet the verb *agō*, although indeed it has different shades of meaning, does not, either necessarily or normally, imply the use of force.

The interpretation of this verb, however, is not just a semantic question. Dr Lloyd-Jones rightly enters a theological caveat at this point, relating to the nature and operation of the Holy Spirit. ‘There is no violence in Christianity …’, he writes. ‘What the Spirit does is to enlighten and persuade.’ Because he is a gentle, sensitive Spirit, he can easily be ‘grieved’.55 ‘The Holy Spirit never browbeats us … The impulse can be very strong, but there is no “driving”, there is no compulsion.’

Next, if to be ‘led by the Spirit of God’ (14a) is an elaboration of to ‘put to death the misdeeds of the body’ by the agency of the Spirit (13b), then the statement that you *are sons of God* (14b) elaborates the promise ‘you will live’ (13c). The new, rich, full life, which is enjoyed by those who put their misdeeds to death, is precisely the experience of being God’s children. It is evident then that the popular notion of ‘the universal fatherhood of God’ is not true. To be sure, all human beings are God’s ‘offspring’ by creation, but we become his reconciled ‘children’ only by adoption or new birth.58 Just as it is only those who are indwelt by the Spirit who belong to Christ (9), so it is only those who are led by the Spirit who are the sons and daughters of God (14). As such we are granted a specially close, personal, loving relationship with our heavenly Father, immediate and bold access to him in prayer, membership of his worldwide family, and nomination as his heirs, to which Paul will come in verse 17. He now enlarges on some of these privileges.

Secondly, the Spirit replaces fear with freedom in our relationship to God (15). This Paul attributes to the nature of the Spirit we received (an aorist, alluding to our conversion): *For you did not receive a spirit* (or probably ‘the Spirit’) *that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship* (or ‘of adoption’, av, reb). F. F. Bruce reminds us that we must interpret the implications of our adoption in terms not of our contemporary culture but of the Greco-Roman culture of Paul’s day. He writes: ‘The term “adoption” may have a somewhat artificial sound in our ears; but in the Roman world of the first century ad an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit [*sc.* not in the smallest degree] inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature, and might well enjoy the father’s affection more fully and reproduce the father’s character more worthily.’

Both here in verse 15 and in Galatians 4:1ff. Paul uses the imagery of slavery and freedom with which to contrast the two eras, the old age and the new, and so our pre- and post-conversion situation. The slavery of the old age led to fear, especially of God as our judge; the freedom of the new age gives us boldness to approach God as our Father. So everything has changed. True, we are still slaves of Christ (1:1), of God (6:22) and of righteousness (6:18f.), but these slaveries, far from being incompatible with freedom, are its essence. Freedom, not fear, now rules our lives.

The punctuation of the end of verse 15 and of verse 16 is disputed. Paul enunciates three truths, namely that we *received the Spirit of sonship* (15a), that *we cry*, ‘Abba, *Father*’ (15b), and that *the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children* (16). The uncertainty is how these three truths relate to one another, and in particular whether our ‘*Abba*, Father’ cry should be attached to the clause preceding or following it. If the former is right, then we ‘received … a Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry “Abba! Father!” ’ (reb). If the latter is correct, however, then the sentence reads: ‘When we cry “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (rsv). The difference is not great. In the first rendering the ‘*Abba*, Father’ cry is the result of our receiving the Spirit of adoption; in the second it is the explanation of the Spirit’s inward witness. Either way, the gift of the Spirit, the cry and the witness belong together. But on balance I prefer the second interpretation, since then Paul is seen to move on from our relationship and attitude to God in general (not slavery but sonship, not fear but freedom) to the particular expression of it when we pray, from the nature of the Spirit we received to the witness of the Spirit in our prayers.

Thirdly, the Spirit prompts us in our prayers to call God ‘Father’. The preservation side by side of the Aramaic (*abba*) and Greek (*patēr*) words for ‘father’, which some commentators since Augustine have seen as a symbol of the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in God’s family, seems to go back to Jesus’ agony in the garden of Gethsemane, when he is recorded as having prayed ‘*Abba*, Father’. Joachim Jeremias’ researches into the prayer literature of ancient Judaism convinced him that Jesus’ use of this colloquial and familiar term of address to God was unique. ‘*Abba* was an everyday word, a homely family-word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner. Jesus did it always, in all his prayers which are handed down to us, with one single exception, the cry from the cross.’

Although some scholars, both Jewish and Christian, are now suggesting that Jeremias’ case was overstated and needs to be modified, his main thesis stands. Further, Jesus told his disciples to pray ‘Our Father’, and thus authorized them to use in their address to God the very same intimate term which he used. ‘He empowers them to speak to their Heavenly Father literally as the small child speaks to his father, in the same confident and childlike manner.’63 ‘Jewish usage shows how this Father-child relationship to God far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new.’

Some maintain that the Greek verb for *we cry* (*krazō*) is such a strong one that it expresses a loud, spontaneous, emotional ejaculation. Certainly it was used many times in the gospels for the shouts of demons when confronted by Jesus, and it can be translated ‘cry out, scream, shriek’ (BAGD). But it can equally well be rendered ‘call’ or ‘cry’, and so refer either to a liturgical acclamation in public worship or to a calling upon God in private devotion. In this case ‘Paul finds the particularity of *krazein*, not in enthusiasm or ecstasy, but in childlike and joyous assurance as contrasted with the attitude of the servant’.

In such prayers to the Father we experience the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For ‘when we cry, “Abba! Father!” ’ taking on our lips the very words which Jesus used, ‘it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (15b–16, rsv). The words are ours, but the witness is his. How is his witness borne, then, and what is implied by the prefix *syn* in the verb *symmartyreō*? Normally *syn* is translated ‘together with’, in which case there would be two witnesses here, the Holy Spirit confirming and endorsing our own spirit’s consciousness of God’s fatherhood. So neb: ‘In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God’s children.’ This would be readily understandable, since the Old Testament required two witnesses to establish a testimony. On the other hand, is it really possible in experience to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and our human spirit? More important, would not these two witnesses be inappropriately matched? Surely ‘we cannot stand alongside the Holy Spirit and give testimony’? For ‘what standing has our spirit in *this* matter? Of itself it surely has no right at all to testify to our being sons of God’. In this case the prefix *syn* is simply intensive, and Paul meant that the Holy Spirit bears a strong inward witness *to* our spirit that we are God’s children.

It is natural to associate this experience with what Paul has written earlier about a similar inward ministry of the Holy Spirit. According to 5:5 God through the Holy Spirit ‘has poured out his love into our hearts’. According to 8:16 the Holy Spirit ‘affirms to our spirit that we are God’s children’ (reb). Each verse gives us an example of the Holy Spirit’s ministry of inward assurance, as he convinces us of the reality of God’s love on the one hand and of God’s fatherhood on the other. Indeed, it would be hard to separate these, since God’s love has been conspicuously lavished upon us in making us his children.70 Although we have no liberty to circumscribe God’s activity in any way, it seems from Christian biographies that God gives these experiences to his people chiefly when they pray, whether in public or in private.

Fourthly, the Spirit is the firstfruits of our inheritance (17, 23). Paul cannot leave this topic of our being God’s children without pointing out its implication for the future. *Now if we are children, then we are heirs* as well—*heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ* (17a). At first sight this seems to refer to that heavenly inheritance, which ‘can never perish, spoil or fade’, which God is keeping in heaven for us.72 It is possible, however, that the inheritance Paul has in mind is not something God intends to bestow on us but God himself. Indeed, ‘it is difficult to suppress the richer and deeper thought that God himself is the inheritance of his children’.

This notion was not unfamiliar to Israel in Old Testament days. The Levites, for example, knew that they had been given no inheritance among their brothers because the Lord himself was their inheritance. And godly individual Israelites could confidently affirm that God was their portion. For example, ‘Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever’.75 Moreover, the day is coming when God will be ‘all in all’, or ‘everything to every one’ (rsv). As for the further astonishing statement that God’s heirs are also co-heirs with Christ, we recall how Jesus himself had prayed that his own might be with him, and might see his glory and share his love. And although it is still future, our inheritance is certain, since the Holy Spirit is himself its firstfruit (23), guaranteeing that the harvest will follow in due course. Thus the same indwelling Spirit who assures us that we are God’s children also assures us that we are his heirs.

There is a qualification, however: *if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory* (17a). Scripture lays a strong emphasis on the principle that suffering is the path to glory. It was so for the Messiah (‘did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’). It is so for the messianic community also (5:2f.). Peter teaches this as clearly as Paul: ‘Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.’ For the essence of discipleship is union with Christ, and this means identification with him in both his sufferings and his glory.

I do not feel able to leave these verses without alluding to an interpretation of them to which Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones has given currency. He devoted four chapters to the expression ‘you received the Spirit of adoption’ (15) and eight more to ‘the witness of the Spirit’ (16). Following Thomas Goodwin and other Puritans, he understood the former as ‘a very special form or type of assurance’, more emotional than intellectual, given subsequent to conversion though not essential for salvation, and conveying a profound feeling of security in our Father’s love. Similarly, he interpreted the witness of the Spirit (which he identified with the ‘baptism’ and the ‘sealing’ of the Spirit) as a distinctive and overwhelming experience which confers ‘an absolute assurance’.83 ‘This is the highest form of assurance possible; there is nothing beyond it. It is the acme, the zenith of assurance and certainty of salvation.’ Although ‘it is wrong to standardize the experience’,85 since it comes with many variations of intensity and duration, yet it is a direct and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, unpredictable, uncontrollable and unforgettable. It brings a heightened love for God, an unspeakable joy, and an uninhibited boldness in witness. Dr Lloyd-Jones went on to defend his thesis by appealing to an impressive array of historical testimonies. Despite the diversity of their ecclesiastical backgrounds, they manifest ‘a strange and curious unanimity’.

I have no wish whatever to call in question the authenticity of the experiences described. Nor do I doubt that many Christian people continue to be granted similar profound encounters with God today. Nor is there any problem in affirming that the ministry of the Spirit of adoption (15) and the inner witness of the Spirit (16) are designed to bring us assurance. My anxiety is whether the biblical texts have been rightly interpreted. I have the uneasy feeling that it is the experiences which have determined the exposition. For the natural reading of Romans 8:14–17 is surely that *all* believers are ‘led by the Spirit’ (14), have ‘received a Spirit of adoption’ (15, reb), and cry ‘*Abba*, Father’ as the Spirit himself bears witness to them that they are God’s children (16) and therefore also his heirs (17). There is no indication in these four verses that a special, distinctive or overwhelming experience is in mind, which needs to be sought by all although it is given only to some. On the contrary, the whole paragraph appears to be descriptive of what is, or should be, common to all believers. Though doubtless in differing degrees of intensity, all who have the Spirit’s indwelling (9) are given the Spirit’s witness too (15–16).

Looking back now over the first half of Romans 8, we have seen something of the multiple ministries of the Holy Spirit. He has liberated us from the bondage of the law (2), while at the same time he empowers us to fulfil its just requirement (4). We now live each day according to the Spirit and set our minds on his desires (5). He lives in us (9), gives life to our spirits (10), and will one day give life to our bodies too (11). His indwelling obliges us to live his way (12), and his power enables us to put to death our body’s misdeeds (13). He leads us as God’s children (14) and bears witness to our spirit that this is what we are (15–16). He himself is also the foretaste of our inheritance in glory (17, 23). It is his indwelling which makes the fundamental difference between Romans 7 and Romans 8.

**2. The glory of God’s children (18–27)**

Paul now moves on from the present ministry of God’s Spirit to the future glory of God’s children, of which indeed the Holy Spirit is *the firstfruits* (23). What prompted this development was clearly his allusion to our sharing in the sufferings and glory of Christ (17). For ‘suffering and glory’ is the theme throughout this section, first the sufferings and glory of God’s creation (19–22) and then the sufferings and glory of God’s children (23–27). Four general, introductory points about them need to be made.

First, the sufferings and the glory belong together indissolubly. They did in the experience of Christ; they do in the experience of his people also (17). It is only after we ‘have suffered a little while’ that we will enter God’s ‘eternal glory in Christ’, to which he has called us. So the sufferings and the glory are married; they cannot be divorced. They are welded; they cannot be broken apart.

Secondly, the sufferings and the glory characterize the two ages or aeons. The contrast between this age and the age to come, and so between the present and the future, between the already and the not yet, is neatly summed up in the two terms *pathēmata* (sufferings) and *doxa* (glory). Moreover, the ‘sufferings’ include not only the opposition of the world, but all our human frailty as well, both physical and moral, which is due to our provisional, half-saved condition. The ‘glory’, however, is the unutterable splendour of God, eternal, immortal and incorruptible. One day it *will be revealed* (18). This end-time disclosure will be made ‘to us’ (rsv), because we will see it, and *in us* (niv), because we will share in it and be changed by it.88 It is also ‘in store for us’ (reb), although the precise nature of ‘what we will be has not yet been made known’.89

Thirdly, the sufferings and the glory cannot be compared. *I consider*, writes Paul, expressing ‘a firm conviction reached by rational thought on the basis of the gospel’, *that our present sufferings*, or literally ‘the sufferings of the now time’, of this continuing age, painful though they are (as Paul knows well from experience), *are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us* (18). ‘Suffering’ and ‘glory’ are inseparable, since suffering is the way to glory (see verse 17), but they are not comparable. They need to be contrasted, not compared. In an earlier letter Paul has evaluated them in terms of their ‘weight’. Our present troubles, he declared, are ‘light and momentary’, but the glory to come is ‘eternal’ and ‘far outweighs them all’. The magnificence of God’s revealed glory will greatly surpass the unpleasantness of our sufferings.

Fourthly, the sufferings and the glory concern both God’s creation and God’s children. Paul now writes from a cosmic perspective. The sufferings and glory of the old creation (the material order) and of the new (the people of God) are integrally related to each other. Both creations are suffering and groaning now; both are going to be set free together. As nature shared in the curse, and now shares in the pain, so it will also share in the glory. Hence *the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed* (19). The word for ‘eager expectation’ is *apokaradokia*, which is derived from *kara*, the head. It means ‘to wait with the head raised, and the eye fixed on that point of the horizon from which the expected object is to come’. It depicts somebody standing ‘on tiptoe’ (jbp) or ‘stretching the neck, craning forward’ in order to be able to see. And what the creation is looking for is the revelation of God’s children, that is, the disclosure of their identity on the one hand and their investiture with glory on the other. This will be the signal for the renewal of the whole creation.

But what is meant by *the creation* (*hē ktisis*), an expression which occurs four times in verses 19–22, once in each verse? The reb translation ‘the created universe’ is something of an anachronism, since Paul had no knowledge of the galaxies. His focus will have been on the earth, as the stage on which the drama of fall and redemption is being played. By *the creation*, then, he will have intended ‘the earth, with all it contains, animate and inanimate, man excepted’, or ‘the sum-total of subhuman nature’.96

*a. The sufferings and glory of God’s creation (20–22)*

Paul personifies ‘the creation’, much as we often personify ‘nature’. Indeed, there is ‘nothing … unnatural, unusual or unscriptural’ about doing so, since such personifications are quite common in the Old Testament. For example, the heavens, earth and sea, with all their contents, the fields, trees of the forest, rivers and mountains are all summoned to rejoice and to sing to Yahweh.98

The apostle now makes three statements about the creation, which relate respectively to its past, future and present.

First, *the creation was subjected to frustration* (20a). This reference to the past must surely be to the judgment of God, which fell on the natural order following Adam’s disobedience. The ground was cursed because of him. In consequence, it would ‘produce thorns and thistles’, so that Adam and his descendants would extract food from it only by ‘painful toil’ and sweat, until death claimed them and they returned to the dust from which they had been taken. Paul does not allude to these details. Instead, he sums up the result of God’s curse by the one word *mataiotēs*, *frustration*. It means ‘emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness’ (BAGD). The basic idea is emptiness, whether of purpose or of result. It is the word chosen by the lxx translators for ‘Vanity of vanities!… All is vanity’, which niv finely renders ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!… Utterly meaningless!’ As C. J. Vaughan comments, ‘the whole Book of Ecclesiastes is a commentary upon this verse’. For it expresses the existential absurdity of a life lived ‘under the sun’, imprisoned in time and space, with no ultimate reference point to either God or eternity.

The apostle adds that the creation’s subjection to frustration or ‘futility’ (rsv) was *not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope* (20b). These last two words are enough to prove that the person in mind, whose will subjected the creation to futility, was neither Satan nor Adam, as a few commentators have suggested. Only God, being both Judge and Saviour, entertained hope for the world he cursed.

Secondly, *the creation itself will be liberated* (21a). The word ‘hope’ is the pivot on which Paul turns from the past to the future of creation. Its subjection to frustration will not last for ever, God has promised. One day it will experience a new beginning, which Paul terms a ‘liberation’, with both a negative and a positive aspect.

Negatively, creation will be *liberated from its bondage to decay* (21b). *Phthora* (*decay*) seems to denote not only that the universe is running down (as we would say), but that nature is also enslaved, locked into an unending cycle, so that conception, birth and growth are relentlessly followed by decline, decay, death and decomposition. In addition, there may be a passing reference to predation and pain, especially the latter which is mentioned in the next verse. So futility, bondage, decay and pain are the words the apostle uses to indicate that creation is out of joint because it is under judgment. It still works, for the mechanisms of nature are fine-tuned and delicately balanced. And much of it is breathtakingly beautiful, revealing the Creator’s hand. But it is also in bondage to disintegration and frustration. In the end, however, it will be ‘freed from the shackles of mortality’ (reb), ‘rescued from the tyranny of change and decay’ (jbp).

Positively, creation will be *liberated … into the glorious freedom of the children of God* (21c), literally ‘into the freedom of their glory’. These nouns correspond to those of the previous clause, for nature will be brought out of bondage into freedom, out of decay into glory; that is, out of corruption into incorruption. Indeed, God’s creation will share in the glory of God’s children, which is itself the glory of Christ (see 17–18).

This expectation that nature itself will be renewed is integral to the Old Testament prophetic vision of the messianic age, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah. Vivid images are used to express Israel’s faith that the earth and the heavens will be changed like clothing; that God ‘will create new heavens and a new earth’, including a new Jerusalem;103 that the desert will blossom like the crocus, and so display the glory of Yahweh; that wild and domestic animals will co-exist in peace, and that even the most ferocious and poisonous creatures ‘will neither harm nor destroy’ throughout God’s new world.105

The New Testament writers do not take up the details of this poetic imagery. But Jesus himself spoke of the ‘new birth’ (*palingenesia*) of the world at his coming; Peter of the ‘restoration’ (*apokatastasis*) of all things; Paul here of the liberation, and elsewhere of the reconciliation, of all things;108 and John of the new heaven and earth, in which God will dwell with his people, and from which all separation, sorrow, pain and death will have been eliminated. It would not be wise for us to speculate, let alone dogmatize, how the biblical and the scientific accounts of reality correspond or harmonize, either in the present or in the future. The general promise of the renovation and transformation of nature is plain, including the eradication of all harmful elements and their replacement by righteousness, peace, harmony, joy and security. But we should be cautious in pressing the details. The future glory is beyond our imagination. What we do know is that God’s material creation will be redeemed and glorified, because God’s children will be redeemed and glorified. This is how Charles Cranfield has expressed it:

And, if the question is asked, ‘What sense can there be in saying that the sub-human creation—the Jungfrau, for example, or the Matterhorn, or the planet Venus—suffers frustration by being prevented from properly fulfilling the purpose of its existence?’, the answer must surely be that the whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all the varied chorus of sub-human life, created for God’s glory, is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God’s praise, fails to contribute his rational part.

Thirdly, *the whole creation has been groaning … right up to the present time* (22). So far the apostle has told us that the creation ‘was subjected to frustration’ in the past (20) and ‘will be liberated’ in the future (21). Now he adds that meanwhile, in the present, even while it is eagerly awaiting the final revelation (19), the creation is *groaning* in pain. Its groans are not meaningless, however, or symptoms of despair. On the contrary, they are like *the pains of childbirth*, for they provide assurance of the coming emergence of a new order. In Jewish apocalyptic literature Israel’s current sufferings were frequently called ‘the woes of the Messiah’ or ‘the birthpangs of the messianic age’. That is, they were seen as the painful prelude to, indeed the herald of, the victorious arrival of the Messiah. Jesus himself used the same expression in his own apocalyptic discourse. He spoke of false teachers, wars, famines and earthquakes as ‘the beginning of birth-pains’ (niv) or ‘the first birth-pangs of the new age’ (reb), that is, preliminary signs of his coming.

Verse 22 actually brings together the past, present and future. For not only is the creation groaning now, but it is groaning ‘until now’, which makes the niv *has been groaning* legitimate. And since its groans are labour pains, they look forward to the coming new order. Although we must be careful not to impose modern scientific categories on Paul, we must hold on to his combination of present sufferings and future glory. Each verse expresses it. The creation’s subjection to frustration was *in hope* (20). The bondage to decay will give place to the freedom of glory (21). The pains of labour will be followed by the joys of birth (22). There is therefore going to be both continuity and discontinuity in the regeneration of the world, as in the resurrection of the body. The universe is not going to be destroyed, but rather liberated, transformed and suffused with the glory of God.

*b. The sufferings and glory of God’s children (23–27)*

Verses 22–23 draw an important parallel between God’s creation and God’s children. Verse 22 speaks of the whole creation groaning. Verse 23 begins: *Not only so, but we ourselves … groan inwardly* … Even we, who are no longer in Adam but in Christ, we who no longer live according to the flesh but *have the firstfruits of the Spirit*, we in whom God’s new creation has already begun, even we continue to groan inside ourselves *as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies* (23). This is our Christian dilemma. Caught in the tension between what God has inaugurated (by giving us his Spirit) and what he will consummate (in our final adoption and redemption), we groan with discomfort and longing. The indwelling Spirit gives us joy, and the coming glory gives us hope (*e.g.* 5:2), but the interim suspense gives us pain.

Paul now highlights different aspects of our half-saved condition by five affirmations.

First, *we … have the firstfruits of the Spirit* (23a). *Aparchē*, the firstfruits, was both the beginning of the harvest and the pledge that the full harvest would follow in due time. Perhaps Paul had in mind that the Feast of Weeks, which celebrated the reaping of the firstfruits, was the very festival (called in Greek ‘Pentecost’) on which the Spirit had been given. Replacing this agricultural metaphor with a commercial one, Paul also described the gift of the Spirit as God’s *arrabōn*, the ‘first instalment, deposit, down payment, pledge’ (BAGD), which guaranteed the future completion of the purchase.114 Although we have not yet received our final adoption or redemption, we have already received the Spirit as both foretaste and promise of these blessings.

Secondly, *we … groan inwardly* (23b). The juxtaposition of the Spirit’s indwelling and our groaning should not surprise us. For the very presence of the Spirit (being only the firstfruits) is a constant reminder of the incompleteness of our salvation, as we share with the creation in the frustration, the bondage to decay and the pain. So one reason for our groaning is our physical frailty and mortality. Paul expresses this elsewhere: ‘Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling [meaning probably our resurrection body] … For while we are in this tent [our temporary, flimsy, material body], we groan and are burdened.…’ But it is not only our fragile body (*sōma*) which makes us groan; it is also our fallen nature (*sarx*), which hinders us from behaving as we should, and would altogether prevent us from it, were it not for the indwelling Spirit (7:17, 20). We long, therefore, for our *sarx* to be destroyed and for our *sōma* to be transformed. Our groans express both present pain and future longing. Some Christians, however, grin too much (they seem to have no place in their theology for pain) and groan too little.

Thirdly, *we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies* (23c). Just as the groaning creation waits eagerly for God’s sons to be revealed (19), so we groaning Christians wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, even our bodily redemption. We have, of course, already been adopted by God (15), and the Spirit assures us that we are his children (16). Yet there is an even deeper and richer child-Father relationship to come when we are fully ‘revealed’ as his children (19) and ‘conformed to the likeness of his Son’ (29). Again, we have already been redeemed, but not yet our bodies. Already our spirits are alive (10), but one day the Spirit will also give life to our bodies (11). More than that, our bodies will be changed by Christ to be ‘like his glorious body’. ‘Bondage to decay’ will be replaced by the ‘freedom of glory’ (21).

Fourthly, *in this hope we were saved* (24a). *we were saved* (*esōthēmen*) is an aorist tense. It bears witness to our decisive past liberation from the guilt and bondage of our sins, and from the just judgment of God upon them. Yet we remain only half-saved. For we have not yet been saved from the outpouring of God’s wrath in the day of judgment (5:9), nor have the final vestiges of sin in our human personality been eradicated. Not yet has our *sarx* been obliterated; not yet has our *sōma* been redeemed. So we were saved *in hope* of our total liberation (24a), as the creation was subjected to frustration *in … hope* of being set free from it (20). This double hope looks to the future and to things which, being future, are so far unseen. For *hope that is seen*, having been realized in our experience, *is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?* (24b). Instead, *we hope for what we do not yet have* (25a).

Fifthly, *we wait for it patiently* (25b), that is, for the fulfilment of our hope. For we are confident in God’s promises that the firstfruits will be followed by the harvest, bondage by freedom, decay by incorruption, and labour pains by the birth of the new world. This whole section is a notable example of what it means to be living ‘in between times’, between present difficulty and future destiny, between the already and the not yet, between sufferings and glory. ‘We were saved in hope’ brings them together. And in this tension the correct Christian posture is that of waiting, waiting ‘eagerly’ (23, *cf.* 19) with keen expectation, and waiting ‘patiently’ (25), steadfast in the endurance of our trials (*hypomonē*). The same verb occurs in both verses (*apekdechomai*, 23 and 25, as also in 19), and includes in itself the note of ‘eagerness’, whereas ‘patience’ or ‘perseverance’ is added to it in verse 25. The combination is significant. We are to wait neither so eagerly that we lose our patience, nor so patiently that we lose our expectation, but eagerly and patiently together.

Yet it is hard to keep this balance. Some Christians overemphasize the call to patience. They lack enthusiasm and lapse into lethargy, apathy and pessimism. They have forgotten God’s promises, and are guilty of unbelief. Others grow impatient of waiting. They are so carried away with enthusiasm that they almost try to force God’s hand. They are determined to experience now even what is not available yet. Understandably anxious to emerge out of the painful present of suffering and groaning, they talk as if the resurrection had already taken place, and as if the body should no longer be subject to weakness, disease, pain and decay. Yet such impatience is a form of presumption. It is to rebel against the God of history, who has indeed acted conclusively for our salvation, and who will most assuredly complete (when Christ comes) what he has begun, but who refuses to be hustled into changing his planned timetable just because we do not enjoy having to go on waiting and groaning. God give us a patient eagerness and an eager patience as we wait for his promises to be fulfilled!

In this life of expectancy Paul now brings us another encouragement. It again concerns the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This ministry he has so far portrayed in relation first to the law which he enables us to fulfil (2–8), secondly to our fallen nature which he subdues (9–13), thirdly to our adoption into God’s family, of which he assures us (14–17), and fourthly to our final inheritance of which he is the guarantee and foretaste (18–23). Now, fifthly, he writes of the Holy Spirit in relation to our prayers (26–27). Indeed, true Christian prayer is impossible without the Holy Spirit. It is he who causes us to cry ‘Abba, *Father*’ (15) when we pray. Prayer is in itself an essentially trinitarian exercise. It is access to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit. The inspiration of the Spirit is just as necessary for our prayers as the mediation of the Son. We can approach the Father only through the Son and only by the Spirit.

*In the same way*, Paul begins (26), probably meaning that as our Christian hope sustains us, so does the Holy Spirit. In general, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness* (26a), that is, in the ambiguity and frailty of our ‘already-not yet’ existence. In particular, he helps our weakness in prayer. In this sphere our infirmity is our ignorance: *We do not know what we ought to pray for* (26b). But he knows what we do not know. In consequence, *the Spirit himself intercedes for us* (26c). Thus ‘the children of God have two divine intercessors’, writes John Murray. ‘Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven …,’ while ‘the Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theatre of their own hearts.’

Moreover, the Holy Spirit’s intercession is said to be *with groans* *that words cannot express* (26d), or ‘sighs too deep for words’ (rsv). Strictly speaking, these translations are inaccurate. For the adjective *alalētos* simply means ‘wordless’ (BAGD). The point Paul is making is not that the groans cannot be put into words, but that in fact they are not. They are unexpressed, rather than inexpressible. In the context, these wordless groans must surely be related to the groans both of God’s creation (22) and of God’s children (23), namely ‘agonized longings’ (jbp) for final redemption and the consummation of all things. Why do we not know what to pray for? Perhaps because we are unsure whether to pray for deliverance from our sufferings or for strength to endure them. Also, since we do not know what we will be,123 or when or how, we are in no position to make precise requests. So the Spirit intercedes for us, and does so with speechless groans.

It is truly amazing that, having written of the groaning creation and of the groaning church, Paul should now write of the groaning Spirit. Indeed, some commentators have resisted this, declaring that the Spirit never groans, and that Paul means only that he causes us to groan. Yet Paul’s language is clear. The Spirit intercedes for us in unspoken groanings. That is, his intercession is accompanied by them and expressed in them. True, God’s creation and God’s children groan because of their present state of imperfection, and there is nothing imperfect about the Holy Spirit. It must be, therefore, that the Holy Spirit identifies with our groans, with the pain of the world and the church, and shares in the longing for the final freedom of both. We and he groan together.

These groans can hardly be *glossolalia*, since those ‘tongues’ or languages were expressed in words which some could understand and interpret.125 Here Paul is referring rather to inarticulate groans. Although wordless, however, they are not meaningless. For God the Father, *who searches our hearts*—a uniquely divine activity—*knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints* (that is, the people of God) *in accordance with God’s will* (27).

So three persons are involved in our praying. First, we ourselves in our weakness do not know what to pray for. Secondly, the indwelling Spirit helps us by interceding for us and through us, with speechless groans but according to God’s will. Thirdly, God the Father, who both searches our hearts and knows the Spirit’s mind, hears and answers accordingly. Of these actors, however, it is the Spirit who is emphasized. Paul makes three statements about him. First, ‘the Spirit helps us’ (because of our weakly, half-saved situation); secondly, ‘the Spirit intercedes for us’ (because of our ignorance of what to pray for); and thirdly, ‘the Spirit intercedes according to God’s will’ (and therefore God listens and responds).

**3. The steadfastness of God’s love (28–39)**

In the last twelve verses of Romans 8 the apostle soars to sublime heights unequalled elsewhere in the New Testament. Having described the chief privileges of justified believers—peace with God (5:1–11), union with Christ (5:12–6:23), freedom from the law (7:1–25) and life in the Spirit (8:1–27)—his great Spirit-directed mind now sweeps over the whole plan and purpose of God from a past eternity to an eternity still to come, from the divine foreknowledge and predestination to the divine love from which absolutely nothing will ever be able to separate us.

To be sure, at present we experience sufferings and groans, but we are sustained in the midst of them by the hope of glory. So far it is only a ‘hope’, because it is still future, unseen and unrealized, but it is not on that account uncertain. On the contrary, our Christian hope is solidly grounded on the unwavering love of God. So the burden of Paul’s climax is the eternal security of God’s people, on account of the eternal unchangeability of God’s purpose, which is itself due to the eternal steadfastness of God’s love.

These tremendous truths the apostle declares three times over, although from three different perspectives. He begins with five unshakeable convictions (28) about God working all things together for the good of his people. He continues with five undeniable affirmations (29–30) regarding the successive stages of God’s saving purpose from eternity to eternity. And he concludes with five unanswerable questions (31–39), in which he challenges anybody to contradict the convictions and the affirmations which he has just expressed.

*a. Five unshakeable convictions (28)*

Romans 8:28 is surely one of the best-known texts in the Bible. On it believers of every age and place have stayed their minds. It has been likened to a pillow on which to rest our weary heads.

We note that verse 28 begins with the statement *we know*. Verse 22 began likewise. So here are two assertions of Christian knowledge, one about the groaning creation and the other about God’s providential care. Yet there are many other things which we do not know. For example, ‘we do not know what we ought to pray for’ (26). In fact, we are caught in a continuous tension between what we know and what we do not know. It is just as foolish to claim to know what we do not know as it is to confess not to know what we do know. In those areas in which God has not plainly revealed his mind, the right attitude for us to adopt is that of Christian agnosticism. But in verse 28 Paul lists five truths about God’s providence which *we know*.

First, we know that *God works*, or is at work, in our lives. The familiar av rendering that ‘all things work together for good’ is surely to be rejected, since all things do not automatically work themselves together into a pattern of good. The av statement would be acceptable only if ‘it is the sovereign guidance of God that is presumed as the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of life’. An early copyist evidently felt the need to make this explicit by adding ‘God’ as the subject of the verb. But the manuscript support for this reading, although ‘both ancient and noteworthy’,130 is insufficient to secure its acceptance. The addition is also unnecessary, for the order of words permits the translation, ‘we know that for those who love God he is working …’. He is ceaselessly, energetically and purposefully active on their behalf.

Secondly, God is at work *for the good of* his people. Being himself wholly good, his works are all expressions of his goodness and are calculated to advance his people’s good. Moreover, the ‘good’ which is the goal of all his providential dealings with us is our ultimate well-being, namely our final salvation. Verses 29–30 make this plain.

Thirdly, God works for our good *in all things*. The niv translation understands *panta* (‘all things’) not as the object of the verb (‘God works everything for good’) but as an accusative of respect (‘in everything God works for good’). Either way, ‘all things’ must include the sufferings of verse 17 and the groanings of verse 23. ‘Thus all that is negative in this life is seen to have a positive purpose in the execution of God’s eternal plan.’ Nothing is beyond the overruling, overriding scope of his providence.

Fourthly, God works in all things for the good of *those who love him*. This is a necessary limitation. Paul is not expressing a general, superficial optimism that everything tends to everybody’s good in the end. No, if the ‘good’ which is God’s objective is our completed salvation, then its beneficiaries are his people who are described as those who love him. This is an unusual phrase for Paul, because his references in Romans to love are rather to God’s love for us (*e.g.* 5:5, 8; 8:35, 37, 39). Nevertheless, he does elsewhere allude to our love for God, and this is a common biblical concept, since the first and great commandment is that we love God with all our being.133

Fifthly, those who love God are also described as those *who have been called according to his purpose*. For ‘their love for him is a sign and token of his prior love for them’, which has found expression in his eternal purpose and his historical call. So God has a saving purpose, and is working in accordance with it. Life is not the random mess which it may sometimes appear.

These are the five truths about God which, Paul writes, *we know*. We do not always understand what God is doing, let alone welcome it. Nor are we told that he is at work for our comfort. But we know that in all things he is working towards our supreme good. And one of the reasons we know this is that we are given many examples of it in Scripture. For instance, this was Joseph’s conviction about his brothers’ cruelty in selling him into Egypt: ‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good … the saving of many lives.’ Similarly, Jeremiah wrote in God’s name a letter to the Jews in Babylonian exile after the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem: ‘ “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” ’ The same concurrence of human evil and divine plan had its most conspicuous display in the cross, which Peter attributed both to the wickedness of men and to ‘God’s set purpose and foreknowledge’.137

*b. Five undeniable affirmations (29–30)*

In these two verses Paul elaborates what he meant in verse 28 by God’s ‘purpose’, according to which he has called us and is working everything together for our good. He traces God’s good and saving purpose through five stages from its beginning in his mind to its consummation in the coming glory. These stages he names foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification.

First comes a reference to *those God foreknew*. Since the common meaning of ‘to foreknow’ is to know something beforehand, in advance of its happening, some commentators both ancient and modern have concluded that God foresees who will believe, and that this foreknowledge is the basis of his predestination. But this cannot be right, for at least two reasons. First, in this sense God foreknows everybody and everything, whereas Paul is referring to a particular group. Secondly, if God predestines people because they are going to believe, then the ground of their salvation is in themselves and their merit, instead of in him and his mercy, whereas Paul’s whole emphasis is on God’s free initiative of grace.

Other commentators have therefore reminded us that the Hebrew verb ‘to know’ expresses much more than mere intellectual cognition; it denotes a personal relationship of care and affection. Thus, when God ‘knows’ people, he watches over them, and when he ‘knew’ the children of Israel in the desert, what is meant is that he cared for them.139 Indeed, Israel was the only people out of all the families of the earth whom Yahweh had ‘known’, that is, loved, chosen and formed a covenant with. The meaning of ‘foreknowledge’ in the New Testament is similar. ‘God did not reject his people [Israel], whom he foreknew’, that is, whom he loved and chose (11:2). In the light of this biblical usage John Murray writes: ‘ “Know” … is used in a sense practically synonymous with “love” … “Whom he foreknew” … is therefore virtually equivalent to “whom he foreloved”.’ Foreknowledge is ‘sovereign, distinguishing love’. This fits in with Moses’ great statement: ‘The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples … But it was because the Lord loved you.…’ The only source of divine election and predestination is divine love.

Secondly, *those God foreknew*, or foreloved, *he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers* (29). The verb *predestined* translates *proorizō*, which means to ‘decide upon beforehand’ (BAGD), as in Acts 4:28 (‘They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen’). Clearly, then, a decision is involved in the process of becoming a Christian, but it is God’s decision before it can be ours. This is not to deny that we ‘decided for Christ’, and freely, but to affirm that we did so only because he had first ‘decided for us’. This emphasis on God’s gracious, sovereign decision or choice is reinforced by the vocabulary with which it is associated. On the one hand, it is attributed to God’s ‘pleasure’, ‘will’, ‘plan’ and ‘purpose’, and on the other it is traced back to ‘before the creation of the world’146 or ‘before time began’. C. J. Vaughan sums the issue up in these words:

Everyone who is eventually saved can only ascribe his salvation, from the first step to the last, to God’s favour and act. Human merit must be excluded: and this can only be by tracing back the work far beyond the obedience which evidences, or even the faith which appropriates, salvation; even to an act of spontaneous favour on the part of that God who foresees and foreordains from eternity all his works.

Neither Scripture nor experience allows us to weaken this teaching. As for Scripture, not only throughout the Old Testament is Israel acknowledged as ‘the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself’, to be his special ‘treasured possession’, but throughout the New Testament it is recognized that human beings are by nature blind, deaf and dead, so that their conversion is impossible unless God gives them sight, hearing and life.

Our own experience confirms this. Dr J. I. Packer, in his fine essay *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, points out that in fact all Christian people believe in God’s sovereignty in salvation, even if they deny it. ‘Two facts show this,’ he writes. ‘In the first place, you give God thanks for your conversion. Now why do you do that? Because you know in your heart that God was entirely responsible for it. You did not save yourself; he saved you … There is a second way in which you acknowledge that God is sovereign in salvation. You pray for the conversion of others … You ask God to work in them everything necessary for their salvation.’ So our thanksgivings and our intercessions prove that we believe in divine sovereignty. ‘On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed.’

Yet the mysteries remain. And as finite and fallen creatures we have no right to demand explanations from our infinite and perfect Creator. Nevertheless, he has thrown light on our problem in such a way as to contradict the chief objections which are raised and to show that the consequences of predestination are the opposite of what is popularly supposed. I give five examples.

1. Predestination is said to foster arrogance, since (it is alleged) God’s elect boast of their favoured status. But on the contrary, predestination excludes boasting. For it fills God’s people with astonishment that he should ever have had mercy on undeserving sinners like them. Humbled before the cross, they desire to live the rest of their lives only ‘to the praise of his glorious grace’ and to spend eternity worshipping the Lamb who was slain.153

2. Predestination is said to foster uncertainty, and to create in people a neurotic anxiety as to whether they are predestined and saved or not. But this is not so. If they are unbelievers, they are entirely unconcerned about their salvation, until and unless the Holy Spirit brings them under conviction of sin as a prelude to their conversion. If they are believers, however, even when passing through a period of doubt, they know that in the end their security lies only in the eternal, predestinating will of God. Nothing else can bring such assurance and comfort. As Luther wrote in his comment on verse 28, predestination ‘is a wonderfully sweet thing for those who have the Spirit’.

3. Predestination is said to foster apathy. For if salvation is entirely God’s work and not ours, people argue, then all human responsibility before God has been undermined. But again this is not so. On the contrary, it is abundantly clear that Scripture’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty never diminishes our responsibility. Instead, the two lie side by side in an antinomy, which is an apparent contradiction between two truths. Unlike a paradox, an antinomy is ‘not deliberately manufactured; it is forced upon us by the facts themselves … We do not invent it, and we cannot explain it. Nor is there any way to get rid of it, save by falsifying the very facts that led us to it.’ A good example is found in the teaching of Jesus, who declared both that ‘no-one can come to me unless the Father … draws him’ and that ‘you refuse to come to me to have life’.157 Why do people not come to Jesus? Is it that they cannot? Or is it that they will not? The only answer which is compatible with his own teaching is, ‘Both, even though we cannot reconcile them.’

4. Predestination is said to foster complacency, and to breed antinomians. For, if God has predestined us to eternal salvation, why should we not live as we please, without moral restraint, and in defiance of divine law? Paul has already answered this objection in chapter 6. Those whom God has chosen and called he has united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Having died to sin, they now live a new life to God. And elsewhere Paul writes that ‘he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight’. Indeed, he has predestined us *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son* (29).

5. Predestination is said to foster narrow-mindedness, as the elect people of God become absorbed only in themselves. The opposite is the case. The reason God called one man Abraham and his one family was not for their blessing only, but that through them all the families of the earth might be blessed. Similarly, the reason God chose his Servant, that shadowy figure in Isaiah whom we see partly fulfilled in Israel, but specially in Christ and his people, was not only to glorify Israel but to bring light and justice to the nations. Indeed these promises were a great spur to Paul (as they should be to us) when he courageously broadened his evangelistic vision to include the Gentiles.161 Thus, God has made us his own people, not that we should be his favourites, but that we should be his witnesses, ‘to proclaim the glorious deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’.

So the doctrine of divine predestination promotes humility, not arrogance; assurance, not apprehension; responsibility, not apathy; holiness, not complacency; and mission, not privilege. This is not to claim that there are no problems, but to indicate that they are more intellectual than pastoral.

Certainly the point Paul singles out for emphasis in verse 29 is pastoral. It concerns the two practical purposes of God’s predestination. The first is that we should *be conformed to the likeness of his Son*. In the simplest possible terms, God’s eternal purpose for his people is that we should become like Jesus. The transformation process begins here and now in our character and conduct, through the work of the Holy Spirit, but will be brought to completion only when Christ comes and we see him,164 and our bodies become like the body of his glory. The second purpose of God’s predestination is that, as a result of our conformity to the image of Christ, *he might be the firstborn among many brothers*, enjoying both the community of the family and the pre-eminence of the firstborn.

We now come to Paul’s third affirmation: *those he predestined, he also called* (30a). The call of God is the historical application of his eternal predestination. His call comes to people through the gospel, and it is when the gospel is preached to them with power, and they respond to it with the obedience of faith, that we know God has chosen them.168 So evangelism (the preaching of the gospel), far from being rendered superfluous by God’s predestination, is indispensable, because it is the very means God has ordained by which his call comes to his people and awakens their faith. Clearly, then, what Paul means by God’s call here is not the general gospel invitation but the divine summons which raises the spiritually dead to life. It is often termed God’s ‘effective’ or ‘effectual’ call. Those whom God thus calls (30) are the same as those ‘who have been called according to his purpose’ (28).

Fourthly, *those he called, he also justified* (30b). God’s effective call enables those who hear it to believe, and those who believe are justified by faith. Since justification by faith has been an overarching topic of Paul’s earlier chapters, it is not necessary to repeat what has already been said, except perhaps to emphasize that justification is more than forgiveness or acquittal or even acceptance; it is a declaration that we sinners are now righteous in God’s sight, because of his conferment upon us of a righteous status, which is indeed the righteousness of Christ himself. It is ‘in Christ’, by virtue of our union with him, that we have been justified. He became sin with our sin, so that we might become righteous with his righteousness.

Fifthly, *those he justified, he also glorified* (30c). Paul has already several times used the noun ‘glory’. It is essentially the glory of God, the manifestation of his splendour, of which all sinners fall short (3:23), but which we rejoice in hope of recovering (5:2). Paul also promises both that if we share Christ’s sufferings we will share his glory (8:17) and that the creation itself will one day be brought into the freedom of the glory of God’s children (8:21). Now he uses the verb: *those he justified, he also glorified*. Our destiny is to be given new bodies in a new world, both of which will be transfigured with the glory of God.

Many students have noticed that the process of sanctification has been omitted in verse 30 between justification and glorification. Yet it is implicitly there, both in the allusion to our being conformed to the image of Christ and as the necessary preliminary to our glorification. For ‘sanctification is glory begun; glory is sanctification consummated’. Moreover, so certain is this final stage that, although it is still future, Paul puts it into the same aorist tense, as if it were past, as he has used for the other four stages which *are* past. It is a so-called ‘prophetic past’ tense. James Denney writes that ‘the tense in the last word is amazing. It is the most daring anticipation of faith that even the New Testament contains.’

Here then is the apostle’s series of five undeniable affirmations. God is pictured as moving irresistibly from stage to stage; from an eternal foreknowledge and predestination, through a historical call and justification, to a final glorification of his people in a future eternity. It resembles a chain of five links, each of which is unbreakable.

*c. Five unanswerable questions (31–39)*

Paul introduces the last nine verses of this chapter with a concluding formula, which he has already used three times (6:1, 15; 7:7): *What, then, shall we say in response to this*? (31a). That is, in the light of his five convictions (28) and five affirmations (29–30), ‘what is there left to say?’ (jbp), or ‘what can we add?’ (jb). The apostle’s answer to his own question is to ask five more questions, to which there is no answer. He hurls them into space, as it were, in a spirit of bold defiance. He challenges anybody and everybody, in heaven, earth or hell, to answer them and to deny the truth which they contain. But there is no answer. For no-one and nothing can harm the people whom God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified.

If we are to understand the significance of these questions, it is essential to grasp why each remains unanswered. It is because of a truth which in each case is either contained in the question, or is attached to it by an ‘if’ clause. It is this truth, whether explicit or implicit, which renders the question unanswerable. The clearest example is the first.

*Question 1: If God is for us, who can be against us? (31b)*.

If Paul had simply asked, ‘Who is against us?’ there would immediately have been a barrage of replies. For we have formidable foes arrayed against us. What about the catalogue of hardships which he lists in verse 35; are they not against us? The unbelieving, persecuting world is opposed to us. Indwelling sin is a powerful adversary. Death is still an enemy, defeated but not yet destroyed. So is he ‘who holds the power of death, that is, the devil’, together with all the principalities and powers of darkness which are mentioned in verse 38. Indeed, the world, the flesh and the devil are together marshalled against us, and are much too strong for us. ‘Sometimes under calamity the whole universe seems to be against us.’176

But Paul does not ask this naïve question. The essence of his question is contained in the ‘if’ clause: ‘If [rather, ‘since’] God is for us, who can be against us?’ Paul is not saying that the claim ‘God is for us’ can be made by everybody. In fact, perhaps the most terrible words which human ears could ever hear are those which God uttered many times in the Old Testament: ‘ “I am against you,” declares the Lord.’ They occur most frequently in the prophetic oracles against the nations, for example, against Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Tyre and Sidon, and Edom. More terrible still, they were sometimes spoken against Israel herself in her disobedience and idolatry, and specially against her false shepherds and false prophets.179

But this is not the case in Romans 8:31. On the contrary, the situation Paul envisages is one in which ‘God is for us’, since he has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified us. This being so, who can be against us? To that question there is no answer. All the powers of hell may set themselves together against us. But they can never prevail, since God is on our side.

*Question 2: He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (32)*.

Again, suppose the apostle had asked the simple question: ‘Will God not graciously give us all things?’ In response, we might well have demurred and given an equivocal answer. For we need many things, some of which are difficult and demanding. How then can we possibly be sure that God will supply all our needs?

But the way Paul phrases his question banishes these doubts. For he points us to the cross. The God concerning whom we are asking our question whether or not he will give us all things is the God who has already given us his Son. On the one hand, and negatively, he *did not spare his own Son*, a statement which surely echoes God’s word to Abraham: ‘You … have not withheld [lxx ‘spared’, as in Rom. 8:32] your son, your only son.’ On the other hand, and positively, God *gave him up for us all*. The same verb is used in the gospels of Judas, the priests and Pilate who ‘handed Jesus over’ to death. Yet Octavius Winslow was correct to write: ‘Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy;—but the Father, for love!’

Here in 8:32, as earlier in 5:8–10, Paul argues from the greater to the lesser, namely that since God has already given us the supreme and costliest gift of his own Son, ‘how can he fail to lavish every other gift upon us?’ (reb). In giving his Son he gave everything. The cross is the guarantee of the continuing, unfailing generosity of God.

*Question 3: Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies* (33).

This question and the next (asking who will accuse us and who will condemn us) bring us in imagination into a court of law. Paul’s argument is that no prosecution can succeed, since God our judge has already justified us; and that we can never be condemned, since Jesus Christ our advocate has died for our sins, was raised from the dead, is seated at God’s right hand, and is interceding for us.

So who will accuse us? Once again, if this question stood on its own, many voices would be raised in accusation. Our conscience accuses us. The devil never ceases to press charges against us, for his title *diabolos* means ‘slanderer’ or ‘calumniator’, and he is called ‘the accuser of the brothers’. In addition, we doubtless have human enemies who delight to point an accusing finger at us. But none of their allegations can be sustained. Why not? Because God has chosen us (we are ‘God’s elect’, rsv) and because God has justified us. Therefore all accusations fall to the ground. They glance off us like arrows off a shield. The apostle is surely echoing the words of the Servant in Isaiah 50:8–9:

He who vindicates me is near.

Who then will bring charges against me?

Let us face each other!

Who is my accuser?

Let him confront me!

It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me.

Who is he who will condemn me?

*Question 4: Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us* (34).

In answer to the opening question as to who will condemn us, there are without doubt many who are wanting to. Sometimes our own ‘heart’ condemns us. It certainly tries to. And so do our critics, our detractors, our enemies, yes, and all the demons of hell.

But their condemnations will all fail. Why? Because of Christ Jesus. Commentators differ as to whether the next clauses are questions (rsv, ‘Is it Christ Jesus who died …?’) or assertions (‘It is Christ Jesus who died …’), or denials (reb, ‘Not Christ, who died …!’). But in every case the sense is the same, namely that Christ rescues us from condemnation, in particular by his death, resurrection, exaltation and intercession.

First, *Christ Jesus … died*—died for the very sins for which otherwise we would deservedly be condemned. But instead God ‘condemned sin’ (our sin) in the humanity of Jesus (8:3), and so Christ has redeemed us from the curse or condemnation of the law ‘by becoming a curse for us’. There is *more than that*, however, in the saving work of Christ. For secondly, after death he *was raised to life*. It is not just that he rose, although this is affirmed in the New Testament, but that he was raised by the Father, who thus demonstrated his acceptance of the sacrifice of his Son as the only satisfactory basis for our justification (4:25). And now, thirdly, the crucified and resurrected Christ *is at the right hand of God*, resting from his finished work, occupying the place of supreme honour,187 exercising his authority to save, and waiting for his final triumph.189 Fourthly, he *is also interceding for us*, for he is our heavenly advocate and high priest.191 His very presence at the Father’s right hand is evidence of his completed work of atonement, and his intercession means that he ‘continues … to secure for his people the benefits of his death’. With this Christ as our Saviour (who died, was raised, has been exalted and is interceding), we know that ‘there is now no condemnation’ for those who are united to him (8:1). We can therefore confidently challenge the universe, with all its inhabitants human and demonic: *Who is he that condemns?* There will never be any answer.

*Question 5: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (35a).

‘We are climbing a grand staircase here,’ and this fifth question is the top step. As we stand on it, Paul himself now does what we have been trying to do with his other questions. He first asks who will separate us from Christ’s love and then looks round for an answer. He brings forward a sample list of adversities and adversaries that might be thought of as coming between us and Christ’s love. He mentions seven possibilities (35b). He begins with *trouble* (*thlipsis*), *hardship* (*stenochōria*) and *persecution* (*diōgmos*), which together seem to denote the pressures and distresses caused by an ungodly and hostile world. He goes on to *famine or nakedness*, the lack of adequate food and clothing. Since in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus promised these to the heavenly Father’s children, would not their absence suggest that after all he does not care?

Paul concludes his list with *danger or sword*, meaning perhaps the risk of death on the one hand and the experience of it on the other, whether ‘the sword’ be ‘the final sword thrust of bandit or enemy soldier or executioner’. A willingness for martyrdom is certainly the final test of Christian faith and faithfulness. In order to enforce this, the apostle quotes from a psalm, which depicts the persecution of Israel by the nations. They were not suffering because they had forgotten Yahweh or turned to a foreign god. Instead, they were suffering for Yahweh’s sake, because of their very loyalty to him:

*36‘For your sake we face death all day long;*

*we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’*

So what about these seven afflictions—and others too, since the list could be considerably lengthened? They are real sufferings all right—unpleasant, demeaning, painful, hard to bear and challenging to faith. And Paul knew what he was talking about, because he had himself experienced them all, and worse. Perhaps the Roman Christians were also having to endure similar trials. Indeed some of them did a few years later, when they were burned as living torches for the sadistic entertainment of the Emperor Nero. Those of us who have never had to suffer physically for Christ should perhaps read verses 35–39 alongside verses 35–39 of Hebrews 11, which list unnamed people of faith who were tortured, jeered at, flogged, chained, stoned, and even sawn in half. Faced with such heroism, there is no place for glibness or complacency.

Nevertheless, can pain, misery and loss separate Christ’s people from his love? *No*! On the contrary, far from alienating us from him, *in all these things* (even while we are enduring them) Paul dares to claim that *we are more than conquerors* (*hypernikōmen*). For we not only bear them with fortitude but triumph over them, and so ‘are winning a most glorious victory’ (BAGD) *through him who loved us* (37). This second reference to Christ’s love is significant, and the aorist tense shows that it alludes to the cross. Paul seems to be saying that, since Christ proved his love for us by *his* sufferings, so *our* sufferings cannot possibly separate us from it. In the context, which began with a reference to our sharing Christ’s sufferings (17), they ‘should be seen as evidence of union with the crucified one, not a cause for doubting his love’.

Paul now reaches his climax. He began with *we know* (28); he ends more personally with *I am convinced*. He deliberately uses the perfect tense (*pepeismai*), meaning, ‘I have become and I remain convinced’, for the conviction he expresses is rational, settled and unalterable. He has asked questions whether anything will separate us from Christ’s love (35–36); he now declares that nothing can and so nothing will (37–39). He chooses ten items which some might think powerful enough to create a barrier between us and Christ, and he mentions them in four pairs, while leaving the remaining two on their own. *Neither death nor life* presumably alludes to the crisis of death and the calamities of life. *Neither angels nor demons* is more debatable. *Demons* translates *archai*, which elsewhere are certainly evil principalities. One would therefore expect the contrasting *angels* to be good. But how can unfallen angels threaten God’s people? Perhaps, then, this couplet is more indefinite and is simply meant to include all cosmic, superhuman agencies, whether good or bad. Since Christ has triumphed over them all, and they are now ‘in submission to him’,201 it is certain that they cannot harm us.

The next two pairs refer in modern language to ‘time’ (*neither the present nor the future*) and ‘space’ (*neither height nor depth*), while in between them, on their own, come unspecified *powers*, perhaps ‘the forces of the universe’ (reb). Some of these words, however, were technical terms for ‘the astrological powers by which (as many in the Hellenistic world believed) the destiny of mankind was controlled’.202 Alternatively, Paul’s language may have been more rhetorical than technical, as he affirms like Psalm 139:8 that ‘neither the highest height nor the deepest depth’, neither heaven nor earth nor hell, can separate us from Christ’s love. He concludes with *or anything else in all creation*, in order to make sure that his inventory is comprehensive, and that nothing has been left out. Everything in creation is under the control of God the Creator and of Jesus Christ the Lord. That is why nothing *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (39b).

Paul’s five questions are not arbitrary. They are all about the kind of God we believe in. Together they affirm that absolutely nothing can frustrate God’s purpose (since he is for us), or quench his generosity (since he has not spared his Son), or accuse or condemn his elect (since he has justified them through Christ), or sunder us from his love (since he has revealed it in Christ).

Here then are five convictions about God’s providence (28), five affirmations about his purpose (29, 30) and five questions about his love (31–39), which together bring us fifteen assurances about him. We urgently need them today, since nothing seems stable in our world any longer. Insecurity is written across all human experience. Christian people, are not guaranteed immunity to temptation, tribulation or tragedy, but we are promised victory over them. God’s pledge is not that suffering will never afflict us, but that it will never separate us from his love.

This is the love of God which was supremely displayed in the cross (5:8; 8:32, 37), which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5), which has drawn out from us our responsive love (8:28), and which in its essential steadfastness will never let us go, since it is committed to bringing us safe home to glory in the end (8:35, 39). Our confidence is not in our love for him, which is frail, fickle and faltering, but in his love for us, which is steadfast, faithful and persevering. The doctrine of ‘the perseverance of the saints’ needs to be re-named. It is the doctrine of the perseverance of God with the saints.

Let me no more my comfort draw

From my frail hold of thee;

In this alone rejoice with awe—

Thy mighty grasp of me.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Literary critic Stephen Greenblatt. In the opening of his work, Greenblatt comments: “The story of Adam and Eve speaks to all of us. It addresses who we are, where we came from, why we love and why we suffer.”24 Greenblatt returns to reflections on Adam and Eve toward the end of his opus: “Our existence would in fact be diminished without them.… They are unforgettable embodiments at once of human responsibility and of human vulnerability.” [[9]](#footnote-9)

**To use the proper theological term, God ‘imputed’ the guilt of Adam’s sin to every member of the human race. In other words, God holds us morally responsible for what Adam did, reckoning his sin to be our sin, and condemning us for it. This is not unjust. Adam was ideally suited to serve as our representative, and he was given every opportunity to succeed.** He faced only one temptation, and he faced it as an unfallen man. The temptation itself was a mere trifle: in the whole orchard of paradise, only a single tree was forbidden. Adam had the further incentive of knowing that his actions would affect his entire race. Given the choice between being represented by such a man, in such a situation, or being considered on the basis of one’s own merits, who would not choose to be judged in Adam? Far from being unjust, this arrangement ultimately proved to be a gift of God’s grace. This is because the principle of our representation in Adam established the pattern for salvation in Christ: ‘If, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ’. **In his perfect life, atoning death and glorious resurrection, Jesus represented his people. It was only by standing in their place that he was able to save them. Thus, in the end, being judged on someone else’s merits turns out to be the only hope of salvation.**

It is often pointed out that the fall of Adam and Eve is not simply a story about what *happened*, but also a story about what *happens*. The pattern of temptation, sin and shame that we witness in the Garden of Eden is repeated every time a human being disobeys God. This is no accident, and what accounts for it is the doctrine of original sin. There is a relationship between the sin of our first parents and our own sin. Our sin is rooted in their sin. Their corruption has become our corruption. Thus the universal sinfulness of humanity comes from our fallen human nature, which has been transmitted to us by the first sin of the first man.

This brings us to a second kind of sin, and also to a second kind of guilt, the guilt of actual *sins*. Actual sins are sins in the lower case. The term ‘actual sin’ refers not to the universal contagion of sinful humanity, but to the specific misdeeds human beings commit every day. Because we are sinners, we actually sin. If original sin is the root, actual sins are the fruit. Our sinful nature produces individual acts of sin. Even if we never committed any actual sins, we would still be guilty by virtue of the original sin we inherit from Adam. In the words of one scholar, our ‘whole being is now marred by a deep-rooted perversity’. But the fact is, of course, that we add to our guilt by committing innumerable sins of our own.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Ryken, P. G. (2001). [*The Message of Salvation: By God’s Grace, for God’s Glory*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bsttsalvation?ref=Page.p+17) (D. Tidball, Ed.; pp. 17–45). Inter-Varsity Press.

**2. What we need to be saved from**

**Sin and judgment: Genesis 3:7–24**

The reason we need to be saved is that we have fallen into sin. From the moment Adam and Eve first tasted the forbidden fruit, we have sought to secure our own glory rather than to serve God for his glory. Human beings are not basically good; we are essentially sinful. Therefore, if we are to be saved at all, we must be saved from sin.

The message of salvation is God’s answer to the sinfulness of our sin. If that is true, then sin helps to make sense of salvation. Indeed, the doctrine of sin shows what kind of salvation is required. The great Anglican Bishop J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) wrote:

The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are ‘words and names’ which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when he makes anyone a new creature in Christ, is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner.

**All have sinned**

Even before they could wipe the juice from their chins, Adam and Eve knew that they were guilty sinners. As soon as they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked* (Gen. 3:7a). It may have been the most anticlimactic moment in human history. Satan had promised Eve that she would be ‘like God, knowing good and evil’ (3:5). So what did she know? Well, she knew she wasn’t wearing any clothes, but that was hardly the intellectual advancement she had been promised!

Adam and Eve had always been naked, of course, but before this they had never felt any shame (see 2:25). They were ‘shame-less’, in the best sense of the word, for they were unembarrassed by either their bodies or their souls. They had nothing to hide from one another and their consciences were clear in the sight of God. But sin changed all of that. As soon as our first parents sinned, they felt exposed, psychologically as well as physically. They were embarrassed by their fatal act of defiant rebellion. Now they *were* ashamed of their bodies, ill at ease with their nakedness. And they were equally ashamed of their souls, unwilling to be known for who they were.

**The shame** of our first parents provides a clue to the first consequence of sin. Sin has the psychological effect of **wounding the conscience**, but the shameful way it makes a person feel exposes an even deeper problem. The first result of sin is that it makes human beings guilty in the sight of God. Sin places us under real divine condemnation. The subjective feeling of shame is produced by the objective condition of moral guilt. Deep down, sinners are always ashamed of their sins, for shame is burned into the human conscience. God later asked Adam, *‘Who told you that you were naked?’* (3:11). The answer, of course, was that no-one told him he was naked. No-one needed to! Adam could see that he was naked because his own conscience accused him for the guilt of his sin.

Theologians distinguish between two different kinds of guilt, which come from two different kinds of sin. First there is the guilt of original sin, *Sin* in the upper case. ‘Original sin’ refers to the guilt every person shares for the sin of Adam. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes explains it well:

The doctrine of original sin postulates that the first sin of the first man, Adam, which was the occasion of the fall, is in a certain sense the sin of all mankind, and that accordingly human nature is infected by the corruption of that sin and the human race as a whole bears its guilt.

As discussed in chapter 1, God established a binding relationship of promise and threat that required Adam to obey him perfectly. In this covenant Adam represented all his descendants. He was not simply a private person; he was the head of the entire human race. Every human being who ever lived was ‘in Adam’, not only biologically, but also spiritually. When Adam sinned, therefore, he did not sin for himself alone. The first sin of the first man was universal as well as personal. Adam’s fall was our fall, the fall of humanity into sin.

The spiritual relationship between Adam and his children is implicit in the story of creation and the fall, but becomes increasingly explicit throughout the Bible. In the book of Genesis, all of Adam’s children turn out to be sinners in their own right. Why was this? Was it bad genes? Bad parenting? A bad environment? To one degree or another, all these factors may have been involved. There is a hereditary connection between Adam and all his descendants, and he did set a poor example for his children. It is crucial to understand, however, that Adam’s children were not sinners simply because they sinned. Rather, they sinned because they were sinners. They came into the world *as* sinners, and what made them sinners was the guilt they inherited from their father Adam.

We could deduce the doctrine of original sin from Adam’s role as representative of the human race. But the solidarity of our guilt is more fully explained in the book of Romans, where the apostle Paul states that ‘sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned’. We sinned in Adam, or, according to the old Puritan couplet, ‘In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.’ We do not come into the world morally neutral, which was the error of the notorious heretic Pelagius (c. 383–410). On the contrary, we are so implicated in Adam’s sin that we are all born in sin and misery, objects of God’s wrath by nature.

To use the proper theological term, God ‘imputed’ the guilt of Adam’s sin to every member of the human race. In other words, God holds us morally responsible for what Adam did, reckoning his sin to be our sin, and condemning us for it. This is not unjust. Adam was ideally suited to serve as our representative, and he was given every opportunity to succeed. He faced only one temptation, and he faced it as an unfallen man. The temptation itself was a mere trifle: in the whole orchard of paradise, only a single tree was forbidden. Adam had the further incentive of knowing that his actions would affect his entire race. Given the choice between being represented by such a man, in such a situation, or being considered on the basis of one’s own merits, who would not choose to be judged in Adam? Far from being unjust, this arrangement ultimately proved to be a gift of God’s grace. This is because the principle of our representation in Adam established the pattern for salvation in Christ: ‘If, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ’. In his perfect life, atoning death and glorious resurrection, Jesus represented his people. It was only by standing in their place that he was able to save them. Thus, in the end, being judged on someone else’s merits turns out to be the only hope of salvation.

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The proper theological term to describe the sinfulness of humanity is *total depravity*. This does not mean that we are as sinful as we can possibly be. By the grace of God, there is still a great deal of good in us, which makes our lost condition all the more tragic. As the French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–62) observed somewhere in his writings, ‘the greatness of man is evident even in his wretchedness’. God’s image is not broken entirely, said Augustine, but our ‘righteousness and true holiness were lost by sinning, through which that image became defaced and tarnished’. Like a face in a carnival mirror, God’s reflection in human beings is distorted and disfigured. Total depravity means that every part of every human person is tainted by sin. Sin affects our minds, so that we are unable to think God’s thoughts after him. It affects our hearts, so that we set our affections on unholy desires. It affects our feelings, so that we are in emotional turmoil. It affects our wills, so that we will not choose the good. Our whole nature is corrupted by sin. In the way we think, feel and act, we are sinners through and through. As a result of the depravity of our nature, we commit a great many actual sins, all of which add up to a tremendous load of guilt. Our actual sins compound the debt we owe to God for our original sin in Adam, and thus we are doubly guilty in the sight of God.

One of the best indications of our guilt is our shame. We are ashamed of our bodies and our souls, which ought to remind us that the problem with the world is also the problem with us: we are guilty sinners. If we are to be saved, therefore, something must be done about our guilty shame. Adam and Eve sensed this immediately. As soon as they realized they were naked, *they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves* (3:7b). This temporary fix was the world’s first cover-up! It was also the world’s first attempt at salvation by works. Like all cover-ups—and all attempts to achieve salvation by human effort—it was doomed to fail. Summer foliage is hardly suitable to cover our bodies, let alone the sin of our souls.

We cannot dress up for God, spiritually speaking, but God does have a plan for covering our guilt with his grace. There is more than a hint of what this plan will involve already in Genesis 3. After God finished pronouncing various curses for sin, he *made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them* (3:21). Clothing our first parents was a way of showing that things could never be the same, that fallen human beings cannot go back to naked innocence. But the clothes were also a sign of God’s grace. They showed that God can do something for us that we cannot do for ourselves, and that is to cover up our guilt and shame.

It is not insignificant that an animal had to die as a result of the first sin. Covering the shame of Adam and Eve required a blood sacrifice, which is part of the message of salvation. Sin—both original and actual—brings guilt that must be paid for through a propitiation, a sacrifice of atonement. Only then can we stand righteous before God; in other words, only then can we be justified. Once it has removed our guilt, salvation proceeds to make us righteous, even glorious in God’s sight. Thus the message of salvation is about such doctrines as propitiation, justification, sanctification and glorification.

**Alienated from God**

The first result of sin is guilt—not merely the subjective feeling of shame, but also the objective condition of real moral blameworthiness. The second result is alienation from God:

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’*

*He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid’* (3:8–10).

These verses afford a glimpse of the wonderful intimacy Adam and Eve enjoyed with God before they sinned. Apparently, it was God’s usual custom (perhaps in the form of the pre-incarnate Christ) to walk through the garden during the cool hours of the day. Since God was their close friend, Adam and Eve undoubtedly ran to meet him, eager to converse with him about the day’s events. Imagine what it must have been like to walk and talk with God, and thus to enjoy uninhibited communion with the Creator!

It was different once Adam and Eve had sinned, however, for sin demands separation from God. Sinners know instinctively that God is too holy to look upon their sin. This explains why our first parents waited miserably for his approach, dreading the sound of his footfall in Eden. When they heard him coming, they ran into the woods to hide. Literally, they hid from his ‘face’.

Though they could run, they could not hide, for no-one can escape God. He is omniscient; he knows all things. He is omnipresent; he sees all things. Therefore, when God asked the man where he was, it was not for his own information. God already knew exactly where our parents were, and why. His question was more like the summons to a judicial proceeding. He was calling Adam and Eve to account, inviting them to approach the bench where he would examine the evidence against them and render his verdict.

God’s question (*‘Where are you?’*) was designed to expose the unhappy consequence of sin. It forced Adam to admit his alienation: *‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid’* (3:10). Here was another new emotion. Sin had already produced shame, the shame that comes from guilt. Now it produced fear, the fear of entering God’s presence. This fear was the proof of Adam’s sin. God said, *‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?*’ (3:11). God knew that only one thing could account for Adam’s fear, and that was disobedience. If Adam was ashamed and afraid it was because he had eaten from the unlawful tree. His fear and shame were symptomatic of the disease of guilty sin.

Adam’s first instinct was to blame God for all his troubles, and this, too, was a sign of his alienation. Did Adam eat the forbidden fruit? Well, sure, but it was really God’s fault: *‘The woman* you *put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it*’ (3:12). Thus the man excused himself and accused God for his own evil, as human beings have done ever since.

Sin causes alienation from God. Human beings were created to know God and to live with him in a personal relationship of loving trust. As he discovered, to his utter dismay, Adam had forfeited this glorious privilege. We ourselves are sensible that transgression brings alienation every time we sin. Our fellowship with God is hindered, and so we keep our distance, afraid to meet him face to face. Since we are sinners by nature, this is our natural condition. As the Bible reminds us, ‘You were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.’ If we are to be saved, therefore, we must be reconciled to God. The breach in our friendship must be repaired. Our communion must be restored. Therefore, the message of salvation must be a message of reconciliation.

**Estranged from humanity**

The alienation sin brings is horizontal as well as vertical. We are alienated, not only from God, but also from one another, which is a third consequence of sin. Having rebelled against God, we now find ourselves estranged from one another.

The breach between Adam and Eve became obvious the moment they sinned. They felt the need to protect themselves, not only from the gaze of God, but also from the unbearable scrutiny of other human beings. Not long afterwards, Adam launched his first assault on his estranged wife. When God asked if he had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he said, *‘The woman you put here with me*—she *gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it’* (3:12). How quickly Adam mastered the art of self-defence! What he said was true, strictly speaking, but it was hardly chivalrous. His confession (*and I ate it*) came almost as an afterthought. His real concern was to shift the blame to Eve. This is the way of fallen human beings. We excuse our sin by calling attention to extenuating circumstances. It is always someone else’s fault.

Even worse, we seek to dominate one another. This is the meaning of God’s subsequent curse against Eve: *‘Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you’* (Gen. 3:16b). This verse does not mean, as is sometimes suggested, that the man’s spiritual authority in the home and in the church is a result of the fall. Nor does it have anything to do with sex, at least not directly. Rather, it is a prophecy about the battle of the sexes and the struggle for power in all human relationships. The Hebrew word for ‘desire’ (*tešûqâ*) next appears in Genesis 4:7, where it describes sin’s desire to gain mastery over Cain. In much the same way, the woman desires mastery over the man and will manipulate him to get it.

Meanwhile the man rules over the woman, not as a servant leader, but as a harsh taskmaster. The Hebrew word for ‘rule’ (*māšal*) is a word for military attack, even abuse. The man seeks to take control of the woman; if he has to, he will use force to get it. This is what it means for us to be estranged from one another. Not only are we isolated from one another, but we seek to manipulate and dominate one another emotionally, spiritually and sometimes even physically.

One can only imagine the bitter arguments Adam and Eve must have had during their long, sad years after Eden. ‘If only you had never eaten that forbidden fruit!’ Eve would say. ‘Well, you ate it first!’ Adam would retort. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes their endless recriminations: ‘Thus they in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours, but neither self condemning; / And of their vain contest appeared no end.’

Milton was right—there is no end to human conflict. Always sinned against but never sinning, everyone a victim but never a villain, there is discord and disharmony at every level of human relationships. There is estrangement in the home. Wives criticize their husbands and husbands respond in anger. Children disobey their parents, while parents in turn exasperate their children. The elderly are killed off in the name of mercy, while the unborn never see the light of day.

There is estrangement in society, where men and women wage an endless battle of the sexes, usually to the disadvantage of women. There is estrangement in the workplace, where oppression is so woven into the fabric of the global economy that the poor are bound by the cords of injustice. Bosses abuse their power and workers rise up in rebellion. There is estrangement in the church, where each separate group claims to have God on its side. There is estrangement around the globe, often in the form of armed conflict. Nation rises against nation; dictators oppress their own people; terrorists commit random acts of violence; and superpowers provide the weapons that fuel the fires of war.

Little wonder that we ourselves should be called ‘man’s most intractable problem’. If we are to be saved, we must be saved from ourselves and from all the unspeakable things we do to one another. Therefore, the message of salvation must tell us something more than simply how to get rid of our guilt and be reconciled to God. It must also show us how to love one another, living together in harmony and community—not as aliens and strangers, but as brothers and sisters.

**Embattled by the evil one**

In many ways, we are our own worst enemies. What we need is for God to save us from ourselves. But we also need to be delivered from an even stronger enemy, and that is the devil. Alienated from God and estranged from one another, we are also embattled by the evil one.

It was the devil who first brought evil into the world, and it was the devil who was first judged for it. When God heard how the serpent had deceived the woman, he said,

*‘Because you have done this,*

*‘Cursed are you above all the livestock*

*and all the wild animals!*

*You will crawl on your belly*

*and you will eat dust*

*all the days of your life.*

*And I will put enmity*

*between you and the woman,*

*and between your offspring and hers;*

*he will crush your head,*

*and you will strike his heel’* (3:14–15).

Notice that God does not dialogue with the devil; he simply passes sentence, condemning Satan for corrupting his creation. This is because God has no plan for the serpent’s salvation. His plan is to destroy the devil, and to save his people by doing so. In order to accomplish this purpose, God established a perpetual enmity between the devil and the woman.

For his part, the devil already hated humanity with bitter envy. His plan was to drag human beings into sin and despair, and finally down into the pit of hell. This is still his plan, and to carry it out, Satan uses every means at his disposal. On occasion, he dominates human beings through demonic possession, but that is only the most obvious manifestation of the devil’s power. He torments individuals chiefly by tempting them to sin and persuading them that they are powerless to resist his schemes. There are also many ways that Satan and the other fallen angels seek to gain control of the structures of society. Hence the Bible calls them the ‘rulers’, the ‘authorities’, the ‘powers of this dark world’ and the ‘spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms’. Evil is more than ‘man’s inhumanity to man’; it is also the result of Satan’s devilry against humanity. Behind the great evils of the world—the unjust wars, the unholy regimes, the unspeakable atrocities, the evil empires—there stands an evil one who hates God with unrestrained malevolence.

It is because Satan hates God that human beings must hate Satan. This was God’s curse—not that the serpent would hate the woman, for he already hated her—but that the serpent would be hated by the woman. Their enmity would be mutual. Instead of trusting Satan’s judgment, and even worshipping him, the woman and her offspring would oppose Satan at every turn.

God promised that, in the end, the woman’s offspring would destroy Satan altogether. *‘He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*’ (Gen. 3:15b). This is the *protoevangelium*, the first promise of the gospel. It is the very message of salvation. The word ‘offspring’, or ‘seed’, is both singular and plural (verse 15a). As a plural, it means that Eve’s descendants, the entire human race, will be at war with Satan. As a singular, it means that one individual, a single champion (namely, Jesus Christ), will destroy the serpent by crushing his head. This victory will come at great cost, for Satan will strike the Saviour’s heel, bruising him with an apparently mortal blow. All of this refers, of course, to the cross where Christ was crucified. Christ was wounded on the cross, but by his death he destroyed the devil.

Sin has brought us under Satan’s power, but the message of salvation means death to the devil. One day that old serpent will be totally vanquished. This means that the Bible contains the only really satisfying answer to the problem of evil. Although God has allowed evil to occur, he is still utterly opposed to it and will certainly defeat it in the end. This is part of what it means to be saved, that God will deliver us from the evil one, redeeming us from his power. The message of salvation is a message of redemption.

**Paradise lost**

Sin has many miserable consequences. It brings shame, guilt, alienation and estrangement. All this, and we have yet to explore the actual penalty for sin, which God pronounced in his curse:

*To the woman he said,*

*‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;*

*with pain you will give birth to children.*

*Your desire will be for your husband,*

*and he will rule over you.’*

*To Adam he said*, *‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you*, *“You must not eat of it,”*

*‘Cursed is the ground because of you;*

*through painful toil you will eat of it*

*all the days of your life.*

*It will produce thorns and thistles for you,*

*and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*By the sweat of your brow*

*you will eat your food’* (3:16–19a).

God had commanded the man and the woman to be fruitful, to fill the earth and to subdue it. That creation mandate remained in force. Eve would still give birth; indeed, in the very next verse we read that *Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living* (3:20). At the same time, Adam would continue to work the ground and to take care of it. Those callings have never been reversed—but they have been cursed. What was a blessing remains a blessing, but it also has become a burden.

The woman is cursed in her roles as wife and mother. In part, her curse refers to the physical pains of childbirth, concerning which the Bible means exactly what it says. But the curse refers to much more besides. It refers to childbearing in general, and thus to all the frustrations of womanhood, including not getting married, not having children, and all the heartaches that come with raising and sometimes losing children.

Like the woman, the man is cursed in his calling. He still has to subdue the earth, but now his work becomes toilsome. The ground will yield its fruit only at the cost of sweaty labour, for the creation itself is frustrated by sin. Now, instead of tending a garden, the man has to turn the wilderness into a garden! Having pronounced his curses, God banished Adam from Eden:

*And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.’ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life* (3:22–24).

The curse of thorn and thistle is not only for farmers, it is for everyone who lives east of Eden. We all experience the drudgery and stress that come with working on the job. Like the philosopher, we sigh, ‘What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labours?’ (Eccles. 2:22).

The sufferings of Adam and Eve come to poignant expression in Masaccio’s famous fresco, ‘Expulsion from Paradise’. In the painting, as Adam and Eve are driven away from Eden by a sword-bearing angel, they are engulfed in absolute anguish. Adam is bowed low, covering his face in shame, while Eve’s mouth is open in a scream of unbridled woe. Milton’s portrait in *Paradise Lost* is equally melancholy:

They looking back, all th’ Eastern side beheld

Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,

Wav’d over by that flaming Brand, the Gate

With dreadful Face throng’d and fiery Arms:

Some natural tears they drop’d, but wip’d them soon;

The World was all before them, where to choose

Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:

They hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow,

Through *Eden* took their solitary way.

This is the reason we are alone in the world. Even at home we are homeless, for we are outcasts from Eden. Having spoiled the garden, we can never go back to our ancestral home. But this is more than a punishment; it is also a sign of God’s grace. The fiery angels prevented our first parents from returning to Eden and there eating the tree of life, which presumably would have enabled them to live for ever in a lost and depraved condition. God has a better plan for us. It is the plan of salvation, which takes us not merely back to paradise, but home to glory.

**The wages of sin**

For the man and the woman, both at home and at work, sin leads to suffering. Their curse encompasses all the frustrations of life. It explains the misery and meaninglessness of our existence. But there is still more. There is also mortality, for the wages of sin, finally, is death.

Death was the penalty God threatened from the beginning: ‘When you eat of it you will surely die’ (Gen. 2:17). There was something suicidal, therefore, about Adam’s sin. What God pronouced against him was the just curse of the covenant:

*‘By the sweat of your brow*

*you will eat your food*

*until you return to the ground,*

*since from it you were taken;*

*for dust you are*

*and to dust you will return’* (3:19).

Death comes from disobedience. The dissolution of body and soul is God’s punishment for the sin of the first man. Spiritually speaking, Adam was a dead man the moment he ate the forbidden fruit; there was no spiritual life left in him. Adam also began to die physically when he ate from the tree. He became a mortal man, with a body subject to decay and finally death.

We, too, are mortals. Having sinned in Adam, we also die in Adam. We are dead spiritually, dead in our trespasses and sins.17 One day soon we will die physically. Our inescapable mortality is the irrefutable demonstration that we are sinners who seek our own ungodly glory. Nothing is more ungodlike than death, which strips away every pretension to deity. The futility of our condition is this: that we will end up right back where we started. Rather than subduing the earth, we will be subdued by it, for dust we are, and to the dust we will return.

There is another kind of death as well, what the Bible calls ‘the second death’, or simply hell. God’s wrath against sin is absolute. He is utterly opposed to sin and resolutely determined to punish it. Our sins deserve the wrath and curse of God, not only in this life, but also in the life to come. Those who ‘die in their sins’, as Jesus put it, suffer the torment of eternal separation from God. They will be consigned to perdition, placing themselves beyond the embrace of God’s infinite love. Those who stubbornly refuse to receive the message of salvation in Christ will suffer infinite and irreparable loss.

These days people are more likely to believe in heaven than in hell. But to deny the reality of hell is to deny the truth and the justice of God. It is also to misunderstand the message of salvation, for if we are to be saved at all, we must be saved from sin’s final, fatal consequence: the second death. The message of salvation, then, must be about the resurrection and the life—the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

**The promise of salvation**

Even this brief survey is enough to confirm that sin is the greatest of all evils. It is the greatest evil because all other evils come from it: guilt, alienation, estrangement, spiritual warfare, suffering, and death. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* provides this apt summary of the sinfulness of our sin: ‘All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever’ (A. 19).

Many great minds have wondered what is wrong with humanity. The psychologist Erich Fromm, wrestling with his sense of futility over the human condition, wrote, ‘While we have created wonderful things we have failed to make ourselves beings for whom this tremendous effort would seem worthwhile … Ours is a life not of brotherliness, happiness, contentment but of spiritual chaos and bewilderment close to a state of madness.’ The insanity of humanity is the inevitable result of sin, with all its miserable consequences. The problem with man, explained Philip Hughes, is that

There is conflict and disintegration at the very core of his being. He has robbed himself of harmony with his Creator, harmony within himself, and harmony with his fellow human beings. This is the source and explanation of all that is wrong with man and the world he inhabits. It is the sickness unto death from which man in his fallenness inescapably suffers.

The best explanation for the tragic condition of our sickness unto death is the biblical doctrine of sin. The world is the way it is, and we are the way we are, because we are sinners.

The sinfulness of our sin shows that salvation is no small matter. We need to be rescued from the guilt of sin in the past, the power of sin in the present, and the punishment of sin in the future. It will take what the Bible calls ‘a great salvation’ to accomplish all this, and in doing so to solve all the problems sin has brought into the world. It will take a salvation that atones for guilt (propitiation), declaring sinners righteous in the sight of God (justification). It will take a salvation that ends our alienation by restoring friendship with God (reconciliation) and by making us brothers and sisters instead of strangers (adoption). It will take a salvation that destroys the devil, and with him, all evil (redemption). It will take, finally, a salvation that gives us life after death—not only spiritually (which is regeneration), but also physically (resurrection); not only now (sanctification), but for all eternity (glorification).

If that is what it takes to save human beings from the wages of sin, one wonders why there is so little interest in the biblical message of salvation in Christ. Jesus is usually considered nice enough in his own way, but generally irrelevant for the problems of the postmodern world. Most secular people admire Jesus as a good teacher. Muslims call him a prophet. Mormons consider him a son of God. Hindus even recognize his divinity, after a fashion. But what all these opinions about Jesus share is an unwillingness to give him the credit he really deserves. Sadly, many people think that Jesus offers a salvation that no-one really needs.

If the message of salvation in Jesus Christ is considered irrelevant, it must be because people do not understand the extent of the problem he came to solve. A correspondent once asked the apologist Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957) to answer two great questions about human existence: ‘Why does everything we do go wrong?’ and ‘What is the meaning of all this suffering?’ When Sayers wrote back to her friend, she was able to answer the two questions in only three words: ‘The Christian answer to the first is, “Sin”, and to the second, “Christ crucified”.’ The reason everything we do goes wrong is that we are sinners. The meaning of all our suffering, and the only hope for our salvation, is that Christ died on the cross for our sins.

The message of salvation offers hope that ‘God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ’. It promises further that Jesus ‘is able to save completely those who come to God through him’. As the Authorized Version expresses it, he is able ‘to save them to the uttermost’. This is a way of saying that Jesus will do whatever it takes to save us. He will atone for our guilt and cover all our shame. He will reconcile us to God and restore harmony to human relationships. He will deliver us from the evil one. He will bring an end to all our suffering and grant us the free gift of eternal life. Jesus is the perfect solution to the problem of sin, with all its consequences. Indeed, as we are about to discover, he is the only solution.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**PART 1: SAVED FROM SIN**

‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’ (1 Timothy 1:15)

**1. Why we need to be saved**

**Creation and fall: Genesis 2:15–3:6**

Humanity has a problem. There are signs of it all over the world. In North Africa women and children are sold into slavery. In Europe ethnic tensions produce warfare and attempted genocide. In the Middle East terrorist acts are committed in the name of religion. In Asia thousands of little girls are forced into prostitution. In North America there are guns and drugs on the city streets. All around the world, people suffer from the greed of the rich, the violence of the strong, and the cruelty of the proud.

Things are not getting any better. If anything, they are getting worse, for the twentieth century was the bloodiest in human history. One intellectual rightly described it as ‘the worst century our planet has yet endured—spectacular advancements in science and technology obscured by evil pure and unadorned’. The new millennium can only promise more of the same: more people, more greed, more lust and more violence. There is no doubt about it: humanity has a problem. Or perhaps we should say, humanity *is* the problem.

This book is about God’s answer to the problem of humanity. It contains the message of salvation—salvation from sin and death through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Its argument is that the only hope for our troubled race is for Jesus to save us from sin, by grace, through faith, for the glory of God.

**What are human beings for?**

To understand God’s answer to humanity’s problem, it is necessary to understand the problem as clearly as possible. Why do we need to be saved? What do we need to be saved from? Why can’t we save ourselves? These questions need to be answered. Yet there is another question that must come first: What are human beings for, anyway? It is only when we know our purpose that we can recognize our problem and begin to seek an answer.

Some people say that human beings are made for pleasure. This was the approach taken by the ancient Epicureans, with their popular slogan, ‘Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.’ According to the *hedonist*, a person is little more than a player, and we should live for all the physical, sexual and aesthetic pleasure we can get. Others say that a person is not a player, but a worker. This is the view of the *communist*, who expresses the value of a human being in economic terms. Our purpose is to be productive. This is also the view of the *capitalist*, although for the capitalist, a person is a consumer as well as a worker. People work for a living, but they live to shop.

Then there is the view of the *pantheist*, who believes that human beings are part of universal being. In one form or another, this is the worldview of Hinduism and Buddhism, and of the many New Age philosophies inspired by Eastern religion. There is no Creator, only the creation, and human beings have no separate existence apart from that creation. Our purpose is to be absorbed into the cosmic ocean, to become part of one indivisible force.

By contrast, the *Islamist* (or Muslim) takes that cosmic force and divides it in two. Since nothing happens without direct divine action, Allah is the source of evil as well as good. He is even the source of human sin, for Allah himself leads people astray. According to this fatalistic determinism, a human being is at the whim of God’s arbitrary will.

Many others say that human beings are not *for* anything in particular; we are merely the product of meaningless chance. This is the view of the *naturalist*, and it is often tied to the philosophy of evolution. According to one evolutionary scientist, ‘Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.’ Thus our biology is our destiny, and we do not have souls, only bodies. A human being is merely another kind of animal, a trousered ape. Professor Marvin Minsky has put it even more crassly: a man is ‘just a machine made out of meat’.3

If we really are machines made out of meat, the *existentialist* doubts whether our existence even matters. Human life starts with nothing, ends with nothing, and means nothing in between. If one asks what human beings are for, the postmodern existentialist says we are for nothing at all. The *humanist* holds humanity in much higher regard, believing in the inherent power and goodness of human beings. The humanist seeks to help people reach their potential in art, music, technology, and the life of the mind. According to the famous dictum of the Greek philosophers, popularized during the Renaissance, ‘Man is the measure of all things.’

Those views about what human beings are for have been greatly simplified, of course, but they are roughly the options in the world today. Is a human being a player or a worker? A beast or a machine? Nothing or everything? What is a person meant to be, and what is a person to become?

**In the beginning**

The best place to learn what human beings are really for is the Bible, especially its first several chapters. Martin Luther (1483–1546), the father of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, described the early part of Genesis as ‘certainly the foundation of the whole of Scripture’. More than that, it is the foundation for understanding God, the world and humanity, and thus for understanding the message of salvation.

In the beginning we learn that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). There is a Creator as well as a creation, and thus we have already ruled out pantheism, which denies any distinction between creature and Creator. The climax of this creation comes on the sixth day, when God said, ‘Let us make man’ (1:26). This rules out naturalism. Human beings are not the random result of meaningless chance; we are the crown of creation, the best product of intelligent design. Although we come from the dust of the ground, God himself breathed life into us to make us living beings, body and soul (2:7).

God not only made us, but he also made us in his image. This fact must be of crucial importance because it is mentioned three times in the space of two verses:

Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

So God created man

in his own image,

in the image of God

he created him;

male and female

he created them (1:26–27).

An image is something made after a model. Like a newly minted coin, an image is fashioned according to the pattern of an original. Therefore, to be made in the divine image is to be made like God. But in what respect?

One way to define the image of God is to notice what the biblical account of creation reveals about God, and then to look for the same attributes in humanity. The creation shows that God is creative, making all things out of nothing. It shows that he loves beauty, reason and order, and that he makes aesthetic judgments. It reveals that God is able to speak, to command and to rule. The creation even shows that God has the capacity for relationship. ‘Let us make man in our image’ (1:26), he says, with the phrase ‘let us’ implying that there are relationships within the Godhead. Then God proceeds to embrace others in his fellowship by making people to love and to cherish. These are all attributes that human beings share in common with God. We have the creativity to make things, and the aesthetic sensitivity to judge their beauty. We are reasonable creatures who can think, speak and rule. We are male and female, and thus have the capacity for loving relationships with God and one another.

A different way to define the image of God is according to God’s moral and spiritual qualities. This method of definition was popularized by Luther and the other Reformers. These men took their clue from the New Testament, which speaks of ‘being renewed in knowledge in the image of [our] Creator’ and ‘created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’. To be like God is to be holy and righteous. Thus the relationship between God and the creatures who bear his image is a religious relationship based on moral and spiritual qualities. However we define it, the divine image constitutes the uniqueness of humanity. God has made us like himself, and we are dependent upon him for the very pattern of our existence.

**Made for God’s glory**

The divine image gives us an important clue about what human beings are made for. Who we are is a reflection of who God is. We did not make and cannot define ourselves. Thus the meaning of our existence comes from God. We do not exist by ourselves, we exist in relationship to him; we do not live for ourselves, we live for him. What is a human being for? A human being is made for the glory of God. We have no purpose or significance apart from him.

The history of creation reveals that God made us to serve him in every area of life.

First, we are to glorify God in our *work*. No sooner had God decided to make human beings in his image, than he decided to give us work to do: ‘Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” ’ (Gen. 1:26).

Work is part of the divine image, for God himself is a worker: ‘By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work’ (2:2). Our Creator is described both as a potter who formed the man out of clay (2:7) and as a farmer who ‘planted a garden in the east, in Eden’ (2:8), making ‘all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food’ (2:9). Our work has dignity because we are made in the image of a working God.

Work was not the result of the fall, but part of God’s original plan for humanity. Adam and Eve did not lounge around picnicking all day. They had work to do! God told them to subdue the earth, to ‘rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’ (1:28). Theologians call this command ‘the creation mandate’. It means that human beings were designated to represent God’s rule on this earth. Adam began to carry out the creation mandate by giving names to all the birds and the beasts (2:19–20a). Naming is an act of authority. By naming the animals, the man was exercising his dominion over the creatures. He also had some gardening to do. God put Adam in the garden *to work it and take care of it* (2:15). This is why he needed a *helper* who was *suitable* (2:18): he had so much work to do! Adam and Eve were the caretakers of Eden and the keepers of the Paradise Zoo, for God commanded them to govern and to nurture all the plants and animals he had made.

In the beginning, work was not a curse, but a calling. Adam and Eve did not collapse in the grass at the end of the day, too tired to move another muscle. Nor did they count the days until their next holiday. Their labour was not a labour. They loved their jobs because they worked for the glory of God. When John Milton (1608–74) wrote *Paradise Lost*, his epic poem about the creation and fall of humanity, he depicted Adam and Eve happily and busily at work in the Garden of Eden. Milton’s Adam says to Milton’s Eve:

Man hath his daily work of body or mind

Appointed, which declares his dignity,

And the regard of Heaven on all his ways.

Work has always been a necessary and pleasurable part of what it means to be a human being made in God’s image, and living for God’s glory.

Secondly, human beings are to glorify God with their *rest*. A person is more than a worker. The problem with communism—and with capitalism, as it is usually practised—is that it reduces humanity to a workforce. But human beings are players as well as workers.

God made us to follow a pattern of labour and leisure. This is another part of what it means to be made in God’s image: ‘By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done’ (Gen. 2:2–3). Six days of labour followed by one day of leisure—this is the rhythm of work and rest God established for the creatures he made in his image. Although our play is often pleasurable, we do not play simply for our own pleasure. We play in relationship to God, following his example and reflecting his glory.

Thirdly, we are to glorify God in our *relationships* as men and women. Our identity as males and females is a gift from God that reflects the personality of his triune being:

So God created man

in his own image,

in the image of God

he created him;

male and female

he created them (1:27).

This is a statement of the absolute equality of men and women. Male and female, we are all created in God’s image. Whatever is true about the image of God in man is true about the image of God in woman, and vice versa.

The equality of man and woman is emphasized by the way God made the woman: *The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man* (2:21–22). The female is made of the same stuff as the male. Indeed, this seems to be the first thing Adam noticed about his new companion. As he joyfully burst into the world’s first love song, he said, *‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’* (2:23a).

Men and women were made for one another. Although we are equal, we are not identical. Male *and* female, we are created in God’s image (1:27). Perhaps there is a faint echo here of the doctrine of the Trinity. The one true God exists in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—so that there is diversity within the unity of the Godhead. In the same way, there is diversity within the unity of humanity. The fact that we are created in two genders shows that we are made to correspond to one another. The woman was the man’s counterpart. While Adam could tell right away that Eve was made like him, he could also tell that she was different: *‘She shall be called “woman”, for she was taken out of man’* (2:23b).

The unity and the complementarity between Adam and Eve were beautifully expressed in their sexual relationship: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh* (2:24). Sexual intercourse is a union; it expresses the intimate spiritual oneness of a man and a woman. At the same time, the consummation of their love depends on the physical differences between them. Thus their sexual relationship expresses both their unity and their complementarity. The hedonist uses sexuality for his or her own pleasure. The naturalist reduces it to a biological urge. But the man and the woman were made to enjoy sex for the glory of God. The first thing God said to Adam and Eve was, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth’ (1:28). From the very beginning, marriage was for the glory of God. Even the sexual relationship between the man and the woman belonged to God, for procreation was part of his plan for blessing the world.

What we learn from creation is that the various activities of human life were never intended to be ends in themselves. We were made to work, but not to become enslaved by it. We were made to play, but not simply for our own pleasure. We were made to have relationships—even to get married and to share sexual intimacy—but not to gratify ourselves. The humanist and the existentialist are both wrong: human beings are not the measure of all things; neither is their existence meaningless. They receive their measure and their meaning from God, who says that they are those ‘whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made’.

Human beings were made for many things, but we have only one primary purpose, and that is to live for God. The most familiar statement of this principle is still the best. It comes from the first question and answer in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: ‘What is the chief end of man?’ ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.’ If you want to know what human beings are for, the answer is that in every area of life—in our work, our play, our relationships, our families—our purpose is to glorify God. ‘So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God’.

**The covenant of life**

The only way to glorify God perfectly is to obey him absolutely. To see if the first man and the first woman would do this, God gave them a test. He had given them ‘every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it’ for food (Gen. 1:29). There was one restriction, however: *And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die’* (2:16–17).

There was a tree that gave life in the garden, but standing next to it was a tree that threatened death. One tree represented God’s blessing and the other represented God’s curse. The Bible does not refer to this arrangement as a covenant, but it amounts to much the same thing, for a covenant is a binding relationship in which God promises to bless his people for obedience and threatens to curse them for disobedience. The relationship God initiated with Adam is sometimes called the covenant of nature, the covenant of life, or even the covenant of works. It had many of the features of a biblical covenant, which may explain why in these verses God is given his covenantal name, Yahweh. The covenant that God established in the garden had two parties: God and the man. There was a promise implied: a life of continual happiness in God’s beautiful garden, signified by the tree of life. There was a condition stipulated: perfect obedience, summarized in the solitary command not to eat the forbidden fruit. There was a curse threatened: death for disobedience. In short, Adam lived in covenant with God, standing as representative for the entire human race. If he obeyed God perfectly, he and all his posterity would live for ever; if he disobeyed, they would die.

In and of itself, eating or not eating a piece of fruit is a matter of complete indifference. The only reason it was wrong to eat this particular fruit was because God said it was wrong. To some this law may seem arbitrary, especially since it carried the death penalty. But remember that God is the sovereign Creator, and therefore has the right to demand whatever obedience he pleases. Furthermore, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the perfect test of human fidelity. The only thing it demanded from Adam and Eve was the only thing that mattered: pure obedience to the revealed will of God. J. I. Packer describes Adam’s situation as follows:

God set the first man in a state of happiness and promised to continue this to him and his posterity after him if he showed fidelity by a course of perfect positive obedience and specifically by not eating from a tree described as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It would seem that the tree bore this name because the issue was whether Adam would let God tell him what was good and bad for him or would seek to decide that for himself, in disregard of what God had said. By eating from this tree Adam would, in effect, be claiming that he could know and decide what was good and evil for him without any reference to God.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil thus forced Adam to decide whether he would live for God’s glory or his own.

Adam was free to choose. The biblical text is quite specific on this point, for God said, *‘You are free to eat … but you must not eat …’* (2:16). Human freedom finds its place within God’s sovereignty, of course, but God created human beings with responsibility for their liberty. The learned Augustine (354–430) used the phrase *posse non peccare*, ‘to be able not to sin’, to describe the state of our first parents. Milton said they were ‘able to stand, but free to fall’. This is because Adam and Eve were positively righteous. This is what made the terms of the covenant of life so favourable. Like everything else God made, our first parents were created good. However, they would remain good only if they passed their probation by choosing to live for the glory of God.

What would have happened if Adam and Eve had kept God’s covenant by never eating the forbidden fruit? They would have lived for ever, remaining holy and happy in their fellowship with God. They would have fulfilled their creation mandate, filling and subduing the earth with the help of their godly offspring. Augustine and many other theologians have also speculated that after a time their probation would have ended, and the human race would have attained an even more glorious destiny. The time of testing was never intended to last for ever. Eventually, humanity would have passed into a perfectly blissful state of immortal obedience already enjoyed by God’s holy angels, who are unable to sin (in Augustine’s phrase, *non posse peccare*).

**The first temptation**

Perhaps it is unwise to speculate what would have happened if Adam and Eve had never sinned. But one thing is certain: humanity never would have needed to be saved. Nor would we have needed the message of salvation. We would have needed God’s sustaining grace, but not his saving grace. The sad reality, of course, is that we do need saving grace because our first parents sinned, plunging the human race into loss and ruin. The Bible does not say how long Adam and Eve remained holy and happy, but it gives the impression that their innocence was short-lived. It takes only a page or two to describe their perfection, and a few verses to tell how they lost it, but the whole of the rest of the Bible to explain how to get it back.

The chapter on humanity’s innocence closes with the end of Genesis 2, where we read, *The man and his wife were both naked* (2:25). Their nakedness was a sign of innocence and intimacy. They had nothing to hide, either from God or from one another. Sinners that we are, this is so hard for us to comprehend—people living, working and playing in the nude—that the Bible proceeds to add this explanation: *and they felt no shame*.

As we remember our first parents naked in the garden, we sense how vulnerable they were, for next we read that *the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made* (3:1a). Already we sense the danger. There is an Enemy in the Garden. How he got there is another story, but the Bible clearly identifies him as ‘that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray’.13

Humanity’s temptation to sin came from the serpent. He began his shrewd attack by questioning the covenant. First he called God’s command into question: *He said to the woman*, *‘Did God* really *say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?” ’* (3:1b). The serpent was the world’s first Bible critic, casting doubt on God’s perfect Word and subjecting it to the suspicion of human judgment. Satan deliberately misquoted and misrepresented what God said. Far from forbidding the man and woman to eat, God had said nearly the opposite, inviting them freely to eat from every tree in the garden (2:16)—with only one exception. The serpent thus turned a positive invitation into a negative prohibition, as if God somehow begrudged Eve the fruits of Eden. He was challenging God’s goodness, insinuating that the Creator was overly strict and absurdly stingy. In his brilliant study of these verses, Henri Blocher comments that Satan ‘presents the ban as a monstrous deprivation. It is not so much God’s word on which he casts doubt as his *goodness*. Of the God who is generosity itself he sketches a portrait of miserliness. He projects the false perspective of a rivalry between God and man; he suggests that man will be the less free as God will be the more sovereign, and vice versa.’ To put this another way, Satan presented the forbidden fruit as a violation of humanity’s sovereignty, an infringement of the woman’s right to choose. For God to prohibit one thing was to prohibit everything.

To her credit, the woman was quick to tell the serpent all this. She said, *‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die” ’* (3:2–3). Eve is often criticized for her paraphrase, putting the words ‘and you must not touch it’ into God’s mouth. Still, there was some wisdom in not touching the fruit, and in any case, she had not yet sinned by eating it. Her real mistake was trying to reason with the devil.

Satan’s response was devilishly clever: *‘You will not surely die,’ the serpent said to the woman*. *For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil* (3:4–5). Having challenged God’s goodness, Satan now contradicted God’s truthfulness. It was the most dangerous of lies—an outright lie mixed with a half-truth. *‘You will not surely die’*—that was a diabolical lie, as the rest of human history has shown. What Satan was really doing was looking for a loophole in the covenant. He was rejecting its terms, specifically the threat of mortality. Thus Satan was the first to deny the reality of divine judgment, and what great evil has come into the world because of it!

The rest of what Satan said was half-true: *‘Your eyes will be opened.’* True enough, for only moments later their eyes *were* opened (3:7a). What Satan did not tell them, however, was that their eyes would be opened to behold their own shame. *‘You will be like God*,’ he said, *‘knowing good and evil.’* In a way, that was true as well, for eating from the tree did bring firsthand knowledge of evil (3:22). But Adam and Eve were *already* like God, for they were made in his very image. Furthermore, they already possessed knowledge of the good. They had fellowship with a good Creator, serving him in his good creation. There was nothing new they could learn about goodness—except how costly it is to lose.

**Sin enters the world**

Eve had everything to lose from the forbidden fruit, and nothing to gain worth gaining; nevertheless, she stood there gazing at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She was tempted in every way: *The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom* (3:6a). The fruit had a physical appeal; it was tempting to the taste. It had an aesthetic appeal; it was beautiful to behold. It had an intellectual appeal, for it held the promise of outwitting God to gain forbidden knowledge. In the end, Eve gave in to temptation. She sinned, and so did Adam. The deadly deed is described in the most matter-of-fact way: *She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it* (3:6b). In those few words are contained the sum of human misery.

It is crucial to understand that this event took place in human history. There was a man Adam, who took a piece of fruit from the woman Eve, put it in his mouth, bit it with his teeth, and swallowed it down his throat. Much of the language in early Genesis is artistic, even figurative, but it is not mythical. The story of the creation and the fall is not a fable. It is presented as history, and it is treated as history everywhere else in the Bible. For example, Adam is included in the biblical genealogies. And when the New Testament explains what Jesus Christ has done—in history—for our salvation, it is based on what Adam did—in history—to make our salvation necessary. The Bible is the only book in the world that identifies the beginning of evil in the world by showing its origin in a genuinely historical event.

The mention of the origin of evil brings us to another important truth: God is not the author of sin. This is one of the ways Christianity differs from Islam, which calls God evil as well as good. To be sure, God allowed Adam to sin. For reasons known only to himself, he permitted humanity’s fall from innocence. But the inexplicable, inexcusable choice to transgress came from the man’s free volition, and the one who enticed him to sin was not God, but the devil. To see this is to understand that God is not the origin of evil; on the contrary, he is utterly opposed to it. Henri Blocher offers an eloquent summary of the biblical posture towards evil:

Nowhere else is evil denounced with such a tireless zeal, intransigence, horror and indignation. It is the disorder that finds no justification, the enemy and the work of the enemy … Since elsewhere evil is inherent in the original being of reality and is part of the very definition of humanity, then elsewhere it must be excusable because it belongs to fate, and as such it must be invincible. There can therefore be no voice raised in protest against it. The myths and the philosophies that spring from them inevitably stifle the innate sense of the intolerable nature of evil, whether it is the evil one commits or the evil one suffers. But the Bible can stand as accuser and can awaken this sense, because it knows that evil was not there in the beginning, but arises from a subsequent, historical use of human freedom.

There are many ways to describe the evil of the first sin. Emil Brunner calls it ‘the rent which cuts through the whole of existence’. It was clearly a transgression, the overstepping of a boundary. It was an act of defiance, a rebellious assault on the sovereign rights of a loving Creator. It was a perversion, the misuse of God’s good creation. It was also a disobedience, a violation of the express command of God. It was the breaking of a covenant, the life-covenant between God and Adam. It was, as it is so often called, a ‘fall’ from standing upright before God.19

There are also many ways to define that first sin. Augustine argued that the root of Eve’s sin was pride. The Puritans said it was actually a violation of all (or nearly all) ten of God’s commandments. Taking the forbidden fruit obviously involved coveting and theft. Eating the fruit was also a way having of another god, worshipping the idol of self. The act was based on a lie about God’s character, and therefore involved both swearing false witness and taking God’s name in vain. It resulted in death for all humanity, and therefore it was a kind of murder, and so forth. More recently, Derek Kidner has emphasized the folly of Eve’s selfishness: ‘Eve listened to a creature instead of the Creator, followed her impressions against her instructions, and made self-fulfilment her goal.’

There is truth in all these ways of describing and defining the sin of our first parents. But their sin was also this: an attempt to rob God of his glory. Eve was not content to reflect God’s glory, she wanted to grab the glory for herself. She wanted to become God rather than to glorify God. This is our problem as well. The problem with human beings is our desire to take God’s place, to live for our own glory rather than for *his* glory. At the heart of our sin is the perverse desire to live for self rather than to live for God, which is why we need to be saved. We are sinners who will not, cannot, glorify God until he saves us.

**What must we do to be saved?**

There are many lessons to be learned from the story of humanity’s creation in the garden and fall into sin. First, we should remember our purpose, the meaning of our existence. What is a human being made for? A human being is created by God’s power, in God’s image, for God’s glory. Therefore, we are made to glorify God in our work, our play, our relationships, and everything else we do.

Second, we should lament what we have lost. The story of the first sin and the loss of paradise is a disaster of cosmic consequence. We can hardly think of this tragedy without feeling deep sadness for what has become of the human race. Think of the perfect happiness of Adam and Eve as they were created. Then think of all the misery and suffering that has come from their sin.

When the Scottish Presbyterian Thomas Boston (1676–1732) preached his famous sermons on ‘The Fourfold State of Man’, he began by preaching on the state of innocence. As he came to the end of his sermons on paradise, he exhorted his congregation to lament what had been lost by comparing humanity to a beautiful palace, now ruined:

Here was a stately building; man carved like a fair palace, but now lying in ashes: let us stand and look on the ruins, and drop a tear … Happy wast thou, O man! who was like unto thee? no pain nor sickness could affect thee, no death could approach thee, no sigh was heard from thee, till these bitter fruits were plucked from the forbidden tree. Heaven shone upon thee, and earth smiled … But how low is he now laid, who was created for dominion, and made lord of the world! ‘The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us that we have sinned’ … Alas! how are we fallen! how are we plunged into a gulf of misery!… Let us then lie down in the dust …

There is at least one saving grace, however. Now we know what our problem is, and now that we know, we can look for the answer. The problem with humanity is sin, plain and simple. Whenever human beings become convinced of their lost and sinful condition—recognizing that they live for their own glory rather than seeking the glory of God—they cry out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’

The rest of this book provides the biblical answer to that question. But the answer is no secret. The message of salvation is that there is nothing you can do to be saved. The only thing that can save you is what God has done through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God saves everyone who trusts in Jesus for salvation from sin, by grace, through faith, and all to the glory of God. [[12]](#footnote-12)

NEW

*Introduction*

What Are “Original Sin” and “the Fall”? Why Study Them Today?

The title of this book refers to the Garden of Eden, and the subtitle refers to the standard Christian interpretation of what happened there. As a child, I learned about “original sin” at my Catholic parochial school (Blessed Sacrament, located in Washington, DC). I learned that original sin was inherited by humanity from Adam and Eve as a result of their disobedience in the Garden of Eden and that it could be washed away by the sacrament of baptism. For many years this cornerstone of Christian doctrine played little role in my thinking. I encountered the concept later when I studied theology at the Catholic University of America. There I first read the writings of John Calvin, the theological giant central to the Reformed tradition. Calvin’s major work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, lays out a highly potent form of original sin. For Calvin, human beings are sinful in their entirety because of the original sin of Adam and Eve. The result was “the Fall” of humanity from God’s grace.

I do not accept Calvin’s reading of Genesis 3. As we will see, the basis in Genesis 3 for his understanding is debatable. However, my engagement with Calvin and other Christians of different backgrounds has become a critical piece of my identity as a “Catholic Christian” (*catholicus Christianus*), to use Augustine’s term. Jews as well as Jewish sources have also influenced my identity very deeply, while I must say that I am only beginning to take recognition of Islamic tradition. The voices of these traditions have graced this little book, which is my effort to come to grips with Christian claims about the Fall and original sin in Genesis 3.

This book is intended for anyone, religious or not, who is interested in what Genesis 3 really says. In this book, you will see how Genesis relates a dramatic, primal account of humanity that will hold surprises for Christians who read Genesis 3 as an account of the Fall. This book is also for Jewish readers interested in how their notion of the “evil inclination” fits into the picture. Biblical scholars and theologians concerned with the Garden story will find help in this book, but you don’t have to be a scholar or a theologian to read it. It is meant for anyone intrigued by what happened in the Garden of Eden.

**The Fall in Christian Imagination**

Let us begin by noting the central place that the Fall has held in Christian imagination. In what is arguably its greatest literary expression in English, the epic poem *Paradise Lost* written by John Milton (1608–1674) opens with these lines:

Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit

Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste

Brought death into the world, and all our woe,

With the loss of Eden, till one greater Man

Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,

Sing, Heavenly Muse, …

You may recognize in these words some of Milton’s biblical and classical sources. In opening in this way, Milton echoes Genesis 3, in particular the fruit of the tree that Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Eden and the resulting loss for all humanity. Milton’s phrase, “one greater Man,” evokes the comparison of Adam and Christ that Paul made in two of his letters, Romans and 1 Corinthians (as we will see shortly in chapter 1).

“The Argument” that Milton added as a preface to book 1 of *Paradise Lost* tells his readers how “the poem hastens into the midst of things [*in medias res*].” Christian readers may recognize something of their own nature in Milton’s theme and even in his evocation of the Latin expression *in medias res*. This expression applies not only to the approach that book 1 of *Paradise Lost* takes at the start of its epic story. It also captures a fundamental dimension of human life: when we were born, we “hastened into the midst of things,” with all the givens of our parents’ world. The story behind each of us is deeply informed by the genetic and physical condition of our family’s generations along with their cultural identities and historical experiences; we have in us what we have received from generations past and from our parents. Thus our story begins well before we enter the world. And in turn, well after we have returned to dust, the arc of our lives—through all that we do—will continue in countless small, mostly invisible, ways. We belong to a story line that we neither begin nor complete.

This is true of the larger Christian story as well. Milton’s words recall not only the basic facts of the Christian story. They also evoke the great reality and epic story that Christians enter *in medias res*. This story on earth begins with Adam and Eve, and Christians enter it *in medias res* with the original sin accrued from humanity’s first pair. Central for Milton, as it was for Augustine (not to mention many early Christian writers),7 the situation into which we have entered *in medias res* has been characterized as the Fall. For Western churches, original sin resulted from Adam and Eve’s “disobedience” to God when they ate of “the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” contrary to the divine command. As descendants of Adam and Eve, all humanity partakes of this state of sin.

**Original Sin in Western Churches Compared with Other Traditions**

For an official formulation about original sin, we may turn to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* In paragraph 403 we hear that “the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men [*sic*] and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam’s sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the ‘death of the soul.’ ” Paragraph 408 states: “The consequences of original sin and of all men’s [*sic*] personal sins put the world as a whole in the sinful condition aptly described in St. John’s expression, ‘the sin of the world’ [John 1:29]. This expression can also refer to the negative influence exerted on people by communal situations and social structures that are the fruit of men’s [*sic*] sins.” According to paragraph 405, original sin, though “proper to each individual, … does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam’s descendants.” Paragraph 419 declares: “We therefore hold, with the Council of Trent, that original sin is transmitted with human nature, ‘by propagation, not by imitation’ and that it is … ‘proper to each.’ ” In committing this original sin, this first human pair—and all humanity as well—suffered what has come to be called the Fall. This doctrine has been traditionally based on Genesis 3, with its description of Adam and Eve’s disobeying the divine command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Other Western churches, such as the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, also hold a strong view of original sin.

Yet other traditions offer alternative interpretations of the Fall. Instead of “original sin,” “ancestral sin” is the term used in Eastern Orthodox tradition. Its approach emphasizes the physical and moral consequences of Adam and Eve’s actions for humanity (such as corruption and death). However, ancestral sin does not impute their sin and guilt to all humanity. Ancestral sin is not a matter of biological transmission. Eastern Orthodox tradition is also less focused on the deliberate disobedience of the divine imperative and the resulting ancestral sin. Instead, rather like children, Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan.

Lacking a notion of original sin or ancestral sin, Jewish tradition notes momentous changes in the wake of Adam’s sin. Some rabbinic authorities recognized death as a consequence of Adam’s act.14 Others held that death was preordained already at the time of creation. While rabbinic views varied about the effects of Adam’s actions, original sin or ancestral sin was not a traditional Jewish notion. Instead, rabbinic tradition zeroed in on the notion of “the evil inclination” of humanity suggested by Genesis 6:5 (as we will see). The Qur’an likewise addresses Adam’s disobedience in Sura 7, which retells the Adam and Eve story. As suggested by various passages in the Qur’an,18 humans like Adam are susceptible to temptation by Satan (Iblis or *shaitan*). The teaching of God in the Qur’an saves from the error and transgression resulting from Adam’s sin. In their different ways, Eastern Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all acknowledge serious repercussions resulting from the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Yet these traditions, unlike Western Christianity, do not hold that humans are generally sinful or “utterly depraved” as a result of original sin.

So why is it important today to think about original sin? This concept has long informed the thinking of millions of Christians belonging to Western churches. Without this belief, there would be for many Christians no real point in Jesus “taking away” the sin of the world. This correspondence between original sin and Christ’s salvific work in the world remains foundational in Western Christian theology. It also shapes the thinking of Christians the world over when it comes to a variety of other issues, in particular the human capacity to be and do good. Original sin expresses the moral dimension of the human person. It conveys the fundamental notion that as moral beings we are deeply imperfect; we can hardly help committing moral offenses or lapses against others. For Christians, it also speaks to our relationship with God. Original sin is not simply about a basic lack in human persons. It acknowledges God as the ultimate point of reference for the human condition; it implies an aspiration to behavior and belief worthy of God. The concept may help us cultivate a sense of responsibility and humility.

There is also no lack of interest in the topic, as shown by two recent books, one by a biblical scholar, Igal German, and the other by the literary critic Stephen Greenblatt. In the opening of his work, Greenblatt comments: “The story of Adam and Eve speaks to all of us. It addresses who we are, where we came from, why we love and why we suffer.”24 Greenblatt returns to reflections on Adam and Eve toward the end of his opus: “Our existence would in fact be diminished without them.… They are unforgettable embodiments at once of human responsibility and of human vulnerability.” Whatever our interests (which may range widely),26 we have good reason for reflecting on the biblical story that gave rise to the idea of original sin.[[13]](#footnote-13)

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