

Notes on Romans 8.1-39

This is a synopsis with some modifications and additions of the relevant section of NT Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*: New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2002).

Rm 8.1-11 actually belongs with Rm 7.1-25, but we are treating it with the rest of Rm 8 because of the constraints of our schedule.

Rm 8.1-11 follows the questions of Rm 7— 'Is Torah Sin?' (7.7) and, if not, then 'Did it end up being Death for me?' (7.13)— and its examination of 'I'-Israel's failure in 7.7-25. Among other things, this paragraph sets forth Torah's *vindication*. When God did what Torah wanted to do but couldn't do, through no fault of its own, he *affirmed* it, even if it was not to bring about the blessing he promised to Abraham. Its role was positive, even when it looked negative.

In Romans, Sin is not the violation of an abstract 'moral law' or even 'doing bad things' so much as the breach of a covenant relationship— and again, not so much even that, but precisely (and yet in that sense) *a malevolent force, a parasitic enemy that infects, deceives, and kills* (7.11). Paul speaks not of 'sins', so much as of '*Sin*'. Sin, in this sense, dwells in Israel's 'flesh' (7.17-18), and Israel, 'made of flesh' (*sárkinos*, 7.14), is just as sinful as the rest of humankind (the point of 2.17-3.20). So 'all the world [was] under judgment' (3.19).¹ God did give Israel the Torah, but 'through the Torah came recognition of Sin' (3.20), not 'righteousness' (covenant membership and vindication). In fact he gave it 'so that transgression might abound' (5.20a)— in other words, to bring Sin out into the open so he could deal with it. So now, 'where transgression abounded, grace superabounded' (5.20b), for by 'sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin offering, God condemned Sin in the flesh' (8.3). This last thought is the key to Rm 8 and the end of argument Paul has been pursuing through the whole section (7.1-8.11), and even since 3.25, when he said, 'God set forth [Messiah Jesus] to be the mercy-seat, through his

faithfulness, in his blood, so that he might show his righteousness'. Having made Sin manifest in Israel, God condemned it in the flesh of his son, Israel's representative, vindicating his people and demonstrating his faithfulness to the promise he made to Abraham long before he gave the Torah. Having raised— that is, vindicated— the Messiah, he gives life in him by his own Spirit (8.11), bringing his new exodus people home to the inheritance he promised (5.1-5.6-10; 8.12-30), which is nothing less than the restoration of Adam's glory (8.30; cf 3.23), his lordship over the *kosmos* itself (4.3), 'all of creation' (8.19-23).

The Spirit appears in Rm 8 like a fresh character in a play. There have been hints about the Spirit earlier (1.4, 2.29, 5.5, 7.6), and we might have wondered from parallels in Paul's other writings why we weren't seeing more of him.² For example, in Ga 3.14, the Spirit plays a key role in fulfilling the Abrahamic promises, but in Rm 4, also about those promises, he doesn't even mention him. 2Co 3.6 speaks of 'a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life', but after saying that we 'serve in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the Letter', the parallel 7.6 says nothing further about Spirit at all. But now, suddenly, there are eleven references to the Spirit in 8.1-11, followed by nine more in 7.12-27. It seems Paul has been holding back on this theme, in order to unleash it in full force at just this point.

The Spirit is what accomplishes what the Torah couldn't do. Or rather, God accomplishes it through the Messiah, by the Spirit. Life is what the Torah promised but couldn't give (8.10), and the Spirit— described as 'the Spirit of him who

¹ As Ga 3.21-2 puts it, 'Scripture concluded all under sin'. 'Scripture' here means both 'Torah' and 'God' who is behind it.

² 'Spirit' is neuter in Greek, Latin, and, usually, English, but feminine in Hebrew and Aramaic. It seems odd to speak personally in English of an 'it', so I'll follow the common usage that points to 'him' without actually ascribing any gender.

raised Jesus from the dead' (8.11)— *gives life* in the present by transforming one's 'heart'³ and 'mind',⁴ including one's 'mindset', 'intention', or 'aspiration',⁵ and hence use of one's 'members',⁶ or 'body',⁷ and ultimately in the resurrection of the 'mortal body' (8.11) itself. The new mentality submits at last to God's will, even to 'God's Torah'(!), and pleases God in action.⁸ Thus the Spirit leads God's renewed people in their 'wilderness wanderings' (8.12-27), as they leave slavery behind, to live as God's children,⁹ and even as his 'sons'¹⁰ and 'heirs',¹¹ 'co-heirs with the Messiah' (4.17), in 'glory'.¹²

It's important to keep in mind that just as Paul spoke of Israel as 'I' in Rm 7, so now when he says 'you' or 'we' in Rm 8, he is speaking to the church as God's renewed Israel, not to an individual or collection of individuals who happen to worship together. Individual Jews or Christians will always have their struggles and failings, but when Paul says, 'you also died to the Torah through the Messiah's body, so that you could be joined to another, to the one who was raised from the dead, to bear fruit to God' (7.4), he is speaking of the same reality as when he says, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to the Messiah' (2Co 11.2). It's not that individuals who are 'in the Messiah' will never fail, but our individual struggles and failures now take place in the messianic milieu, which had not yet opened up in the Torah, although the Torah pointed to it (cf 3.21). Our individual failures are not unlike those of fleshly Israel's, but our 'glorification' (8.30) takes place in the church.

The sending of Son/Messiah and Spirit recaps the sending of Wisdom and Shekinah (God's 'dwelling presence', embodied in the cloud of glory) in Second Temple Jewish thought. 'Dwelling' (8.9,11; *shekinah* in Hebrew) is thus *temple* language. In Si 24, Wisdom comes to dwell in the Temple and is also embodied in the Torah (Si 24.8-12,23; cf Wi 9.9-10). The Spirit is the principle of the Torah (8.5), as we might say, and recaps YHWH's presence to Israel in the wilderness, dwelling in the tabernacle and in the pillar of fire.

³ *Kardia*, 1.21,24 and 2.5; changed at 2.15,29, 5.5, 6.17, 8.27.

⁴ *Nous*, the problem of, in 1.28 and 7.23,25; transformed and renewed in 12.2.

⁵ *Phronēma*, of the flesh, 8.5a,6a,7; of the Spirit, 8.5b,6b,27; with practical effect, 12.16, 15.5.

⁶ *Melē*, 6.13,19, 7.5,23, 12.4-5.

⁷ *Sōma*, 6.12, 8.13, 12.1.

⁸ Rm 8.5-8; cf 1.21-22,28; esp 12.2.

⁹ *Tekna*, Rm 8.16,17,21. *Teknon* denotes family membership.

¹⁰ *Huios*, Rm 8.14,19, 9.26; *huiiothesia* ('sonship/adoption'), 8.15,23. 'Son', in these contexts, is more than 'male descendant'. It's a royal term, denoting inheritance and viceregency. Compare 9.7-8 (*teknon*). All 'son' language applying to Israel, her king, and her Messiah derives ultimately from Ex 4.22, where God calls Israel his 'son'.

¹¹ *Klērōnomoi*, 4.13,14,17.

¹² *Doxa*, lost, 1.23, 3.23; hoped for, 5.2; bestowed, 6.4, 8.18,21.

Despite the Shekinah's presence amid the people, Israel sinned constantly, and the Shekinah withdrew, leaving Israel to go into Exile (cf Ez 10). Thus the spiritual force dwelling in Israel's flesh was 'Sin' (7.17,18,20). At no time after Israel's return did the Shekinah return, but now the Spirit has come— *precisely the return of the Shekinah to Israel*. Paul can speak of the Spirit as 'the Messiah's Spirit' (8.9), and even of the Messiah himself dwelling in you (8.10), so closely are Son and the Spirit identified, though ever still distinct. Christians thus become God's new Temple (cf 1Co 3.16; 2Co 6.16).

Paul is using OT and Second Temple language about how Israel's God has made himself known in action, to speak dramatically of Messiah and Spirit. He can say nothing higher about the Messiah and Spirit, than to speak of both with language about YHWH himself, the one God of Israel, in his saving presence and action.¹³

By explaining the renewal of the covenant, the vindication of Torah, and how God gives resurrection life to those in the Messiah, the final paragraph of 7.1-8.11 provides a basis for the picture of wilderness wanderings that follows in 8.12-17, of the new creation / promised land in 8.12-30, and of the great celebration in 8.31-39. Rm 7 highlighted Israel's failure, which came about not because Israel wished to disobey God but because Sin dwelt in its fleshly nature (7.5,14,17,20,23) (the latent 'Adam' within Israel, so to speak). This, in fact, is why Israel failed to accept her Messiah, as Paul will show in 9.30-10.4: it isn't just that a majority of Jews happened not to trust the good news; but that the God-given Torah was itself part of their stumbling over the stumbling-stone (9.32).

But God has been faithful to the promises he made to Abraham, and now, strangely, he has been faithful even to the Torah itself— 'apart from the Torah, although the Torah and the prophets bear witness to it' (3.21)— by doing, in and through Jesus the Messiah, what the Torah had promised. The 'righteous act' and 'obedience' (5.18-19; cf 3.24-26) of the Messiah, 'born of David's seed according to the flesh' (1.3) demonstrated God's righteousness (3.25-26), and in response, God 'marked [him] out as son of God by the Spirit through the resurrection' (1.4). And the point of all this was so that those whom God vindicated— 'justified'— in the Messiah, in his own just judgment, are those whom he has also glorified (8.30).

¹³ As in Ga 4.1-11, if the doctrine of the 'Trinity' didn't exist, we'd have to invent it— precisely as the fathers did, when they had to formulate in their own context what Paul was saying in his.

6. Torah's Condemnation Abolished, Life Given through Son, by Spirit 8.1-11

Rm 8.1-11 not only completes the climax that began with 7.1; it begins the majestic sequence that sweeps on through 8.30 and even 8.39 and is the heart of Rm 5–8 as a whole.

The Adam/Messiah contrast of 5.12-21 is still unfolding: 'Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression' (5.14)— that is, 'Sin reigned unto death' (5.21a) during all that time, but it was not recognized for what it was (cf 3.20) until 'the law came in alongside, so that transgression might abound' (5.20). 'Transgression' means the breaking of a covenant; this is the meaning of Adam's disobedience (5.14,19). Now Paul explains how 'Grace would come to reign through righteousness, unto the life of the [messianic] age, through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord' (5.21b).

The structure of 8.1-11 is as follows:

- 8.1-4 An opening statement (8.1) is explained by another statement (*gar*, 'for, because', 8.2), which in turn is explained (*gar*, again) by 8.3-4, a sentence with as good a claim as any to be the very center of what Paul is saying in all of Rm 5–8, if not in his whole theology. These four verses (8.1-4) then serve as a platform for and explanation of how God has given the life that the Torah could not give.
- 8.5-8 The next four verses (8.5-8) rule out any way to life for those 'in the flesh'. This does not mean people who have bodies or (for example) sexual desires, but people whose existence is characterized by weakness and rebellion against God. Israel, in particular, is an example of those 'in the flesh' (6.19; 7.5, 18, 25; 8.3–9, 12–13; 9.3,8; 11.14), unable to perform the deeds of Torah (7.18-20). The Spirit is the source of the life.
- 8.9-10 Then the next two verses (8.9-10) apply this to those 'in the Messiah' and hence 'in the Spirit', who have the Spirit, or indeed the Messiah himself, dwelling in them, instead of Sin which 'dwelt in me [Israel]' before (7.20).
- 8.11 The final verse (8.11) draws the conclusion: God's indwelling Spirit will raise even 'your mortal body' from the dead, just as he raised Jesus.

The opening statement, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Messiah Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (8.1) corresponds to the problem of 2.1-16, where final 'condemnation' hung over everyone, for all alike have sinned (2.1; 5.16,18). Paul did

speak of Gentiles who have 'God's Torah... written in their hearts' (2.7,10,13-15,26-29), but it was not clear how anyone could come into such a category. Now we will see that those who have God's Spirit dwelling in them— whether they are circumcised or not— are enabled to submit to 'God's Torah' (7.22,25, 8.7)— the 'Torah of faithfulness' (3.27). In them the *positive* verdict (*dikaiōma*, 8.4, and behind it 5.16,18) of the Torah is fulfilled, instead of its negative verdict of condemnation. 'There is no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (8.1).

God's concern is not Torah-keeping but covenant faithfulness, as with Abraham (3.27-30, cf Gn 15.6). His verdict regarding Jesus' faithfulness (3.22,26; cf Ga 2.16,20, 3.22, Ep 3.12, Ph 3.9)¹⁴ embodies his own righteousness, his own faithfulness to both Abraham and Israel (3.3). Jesus, the Messiah, Israel's representative offered the obedient faithfulness (5.19; 3.22) that God was seeking in Israel, and God is thus right to declare 'righteous' (acquitted) all who 'believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead' (4.24)¹⁵— in other words, who trust God's own faithful action (3.3). By giving verdict in favor of ('justifying') those who live from the Messiah's faithfulness (3.26; cf 1.17), he finally constitutes the worldwide family he promised Abraham— and that in turn means he restores Adam. God's Spirit was at work in bringing those who heard the good news into the Messiah and his faithfulness (1Th 1.4-5; 2.13), and the same Spirit will finish that work by raising even their mortal bodies (8.11; cf Ph 1.6).

Sin— understood not as 'sins' but as a malevolent force— was the real culprit all along (7.7-25), and its condemnation has taken place on the cross (8.3-4). What was done there was God's act in the Messiah, not the Messiah's act upon God. There, God condemned Sin, the deadly deceiver (8.3-4), so that those over whom condemnation had hung (2.1; 5.16,18) might be liberated from its threat once and for all. 'The Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the Torah, being made a curse for us' (Ga 3.13); that is, by 'sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin offering, God condemned sin in the flesh' (8.3), 'for [God] has made him to be Sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made into God's righteousness, in him' (2Co 5.21).¹⁶

¹⁴ Recall that most translations wrongly have something like 'through faith *in* Jesus' rather than 'through the faithfulness *of* Jesus' in these verses, as we've discussed previously.

¹⁵ Or who put their faith 'toward' (*eis*) the Messiah or have their faith 'in' (*en*) him— that is, in his faithful and hence saving obedience.

¹⁶ On 2Co 5.21, see NT Wright, 'On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Corinthians 5.21', available at ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Becoming_Righteousness.pdf and in *Pauline Theology. Volume II*, ed. DM Hay (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 200-208.

This isn't the main subject of the paragraph, however. That place belongs to the Spirit's gift of life— but the outpouring of the Spirit depends on the prior achievement of the cross.¹⁷

8.1. The opening statement of the paragraph comes as a shock. Paul has just said, 'I of myself... serve the Torah of Sin' (7.7-25)— and now he concludes, 'There is therefore (*ara*) now no condemnation' (8.1)! What can this possibly mean??!

It helps to recognize that Paul is leapfrogging to his conclusion and then explaining it with his minor premise, for rhetorical effect: 'I serve God's Torah with my mind, but Sin's Torah with my flesh; there's *therefore* now no condemnation... *because* God has sent his son... [and] condemned Sin in the flesh' (7.25–8.1,3).

The word 'now', as it does in 3.21 and 7.6 (also 5.9,11 and 6.22) emphasizes the radically new and even final nature of God's achievement. *The verdict of the last judgment has been unveiled and brought forward into the present.*

'Condemnation' is the just reaction of the justice-loving God to all injustice; of the creator God to all that defaces and destroys his image-bearing human beings and ruins his good creation (1.16-17). But the problem is that Sin dwells in me, that is, in my flesh (7.17,18,20).

Sin's condemnation has been effected on the cross, in the flesh of God's son (8.3), so that those who are in him discover that what is true of him is now true of them. The condemnation that rightly falls on Sin has nothing more to do with them. When Paul says 'those in the Messiah Jesus' at the close of 8.1, he's pointing not just to people who are uncondemned, but also to *why* and *how* they are uncondemned.¹⁸

8.2. The explanation (*gar*, 'for, because') for their non-condemnation is that God has freed them from 'Sin's Torah' (8.2). Paul has already spoken of this in Rm 6 and 7.1-6.

Paul doesn't actually say 'God' has freed them, but that 'the Torah of the Spirit of life' did it. However, he explains this (*gar*) in the next verses (8.3-4) by laying out what God did 'so that' that 'the Torah's righteous verdict (*dikaiōma*)' might now be fulfilled 'in us who walk.... according to the Spirit' (8.4). *Hō nomos* in 8.3,4,7 is clearly 'the Torah'— not a general principle, but the Torah itself, seen from the angle described in 3.27-31, 4.15, 5.20, and 7.1-6, 7.7-25. All human-kind was 'under Sin and Death', and Torah exposed and endorsed this, tightening the grip of Adamic humanness on those who were under itself and shutting out the 'Gentile sinners' (Ga 2.15) altogether. God's liberating act has broken

this stranglehold once and for all. Thus behind the Torah, seen in this verse as 'the Torah of the Spirit of life', stands God.

The object of this liberating act is 'you', singular. Paul isn't just addressing each reader as an individual with a 'striking and joyful message of freedom'. He is ensuring that those who were in the precise situation of the 'I' of 7.7-25, but have now come to faith, would know they were included in this joyful news.

Talk of setting slaves free is exodus language. The liberating action has taken place 'in the Messiah Jesus'.¹⁹ The latter phrase can go with 'Torah of the Spirit of life' (which is in the Messiah), or it can go with 'has freed you' (in the Messiah). 'There is no condemnation for those in the Messiah' (8.1), because the Messiah is where God has set you free by the Torah of the Spirit of life (8.2).

The Torah remains God's Torah, holy and just and good. It's not Sin (7.7), and it's not Death for those who received it (7.13). So when God acted in the Messiah and by the Spirit, the Torah was still involved, for Torah itself is part of God's saving action. Torah locked the door on those imprisoned in Adamic humanity, but it promised *life*. It was the covenant of the God who finally gave life not through the Torah, but through the Messiah, by the Spirit. In this way, when the Spirit came, the Torah was shown to be the 'law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Jesus' (8.2a).

8.3-4. What was it that the Torah 'could not do'? Protestant interpreters have taken Paul's expression here (lit., 'the impossible thing of the Torah') to mean 'the impossibility of [keeping] the Torah', as though the main point were the 'ethics' of 8.4b-8. This then goes with an understanding of 8.4a in which *dikaiōma* would mean 'requirement' or moral commandment. But when *dikaiōma* is used in this sense it's usually plural— see 2.26; also Lk 1.6, Hb 9.1,10, Rv 15.4, 19.8). Also, in 5.16,18, *dikaiōma* is contrasted with *katakrima* (condemnation), as here; and *dikaiōma* in 5.16 is unquestionably God's righteous decree or verdict, not the required behavior of God's people; in 5.18 it means an actual act of righteousness (of which a verdict might be an example), not a requirement— as we see in 1.32. It seems therefore that *dikaiōma tou nomou* in 8.4 refers to the *verdict that the law announces* rather than the behavior it requires: 'do this and you will live' (cf. on 10.5). That this is the correct reading of 8.4a, and with it 8.3a, is confirmed by Paul's highlighting of this purpose of the Torah at 7.10; by the whole thrust of the argument of 8.1-11 (with 5.21 in the background); and by the point about the life-giving Torah in 10.5-11 (see the notes on that passage). What was impossible for the Torah?

¹⁷ An insight important to John as well; cf Jn 7.37-39; 20.19-23.

¹⁸ Some mss. add, 'who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit'. However, the shorter text is the original.

¹⁹ The NIV is wrong to change 'in' to 'through'. Paul is always careful about his prepositions.

That it should actually *give life*— it offered, but could not deliver.

But 'God... condemned sin in the flesh, so that the *justifying verdict* (*dikaiōma*) of the Torah might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (8.3-4).

The Torah's *positive* verdict is a promise: 'do this *and you will live*'. Paul might be blameless at keeping the Torah's commandments, but what was impossible was *that the Torah should actually give the life it promised*. Moreover, it could not do so *for Israel*, no matter how zealous some of the sons of Israel were. There was nothing wrong with Torah; it was just 'weak because of the flesh'— not because of the *body*, which is God-given and will be reaffirmed in the resurrection (8.11)— but because of the *rebellious and corruptible state of Israel* (and beyond it, of humankind), where Sin has come to dwell (7.18,20,23,25).

8.3. God condemned Sin. He did this by sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh and condemning it in the flesh. Paul doesn't say that God condemned Jesus. He did condemn Sin in the flesh of Jesus; but he didn't 'have' to condemn someone, so that, not finding anyone suitable, decided to condemn and punish Jesus on everyone else's behalf. That theory is known as *penal substitutionary atonement* ('PSA') and, although it has been regnant for some hundreds of years in Protestantism, it is questionable at best. What was at stake was not God's 'honor', in the feudal sense, underlying PSA, but condemning and beaking and executing Sin, so that God could then give the life that Sin was preventing by 'reigning unto death' (5.21).

The place where God executed the sentence was his son, whom he sent 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'.²⁰ This doesn't mean that Jesus only 'seemed' to be human, but that he was fully human, although not guilty of sin even though he was *like us*. Compare Ph 2.7, where 'the likeness of human beings' (*homoïōma anthrōpōn*) doesn't mean 'like, but not really a human being', but rather 'a true human being, bearing the true likeness'.²¹

Sin is not necessary to genuine humanness. It's an intruder in God's good world (5.12). Jesus could and did suffer and die in his genuine humanity. But in his truly human death— in his dying *like us*, God would pass sentence on Sin once and for all. The son's 'likeness' (*homoïōma*) to Adam's flesh recalls Adam's 'likeness' to God, and restores it: by becoming like us, he makes us again like God (this is expressed, in Romans, in the language of 'glorification'; see 1.23, 2.7,10, 3.7,23, 5.2, 6.4, 8.18,21,30, 9.23).

²⁰ NIV's 'sinful man' badly distorts the argument and, by changing 'flesh' to 'man', misses the all-important links with other contexts.

²¹ Jesus' sinlessness is also clear from the earliest Christian tradition; cf Jn 7.18; 8.46; 2Co 5.21; Hb 4.15; 7.26; 1P 2.22.

But how could Jesus' human flesh, and his human death, be the right place for God to condemn Sin? I Jesus was sinless, how would it make sense to condemn Sin in him? Israel's anointed king and priest *embodied and represented* their people (7.4, 12.4-5); so that what was true of king and priest was true of the people, and vice versa.

But Torah came in so *that* the trespass might abound (5.20), and Sin worked death through the Torah so *that* it might appear as exceedingly sinful (7.13). The Torah caused Sin to become manifest, to flourish and abound in one place (5.20-21). That 'place' was *Israel*. God's purpose in giving the Torah to Israel was to make Sin manifest in Israel's failure. *And the verdict against that failure comes down on Israel's faithful representative, the Messiah*. God sent the Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' to bring this sequence to its appointed climax, that in his death Torah might once and for all do the necessary, if apparently negative, work of condemnation for which it was designed. But the other side of this, expressed in Ga 3.22, is that Scripture (i.e., God himself, working through the written Torah) shut up everyone under Sin, so *that* the promise, effective through Jesus the Messiah's faithful obedience, might be given to all believers. Or again, God shut up all in disobedience, in order to have mercy on all (Rm 11.32). In this strange plan to deceive and defeat 'the rulers of this age' (1Co 2.6-8), Sin was lured onto the field where they would lose the decisive battle. 'There is therefore now no *condemnation* for those in Messiah Jesus' (8.1) because God *condemned* Sin in the Messiah's flesh (8.3-4).

KJV says that God sent his son 'concerning Sin' (8.4). The phrase can mean 'because of sin' or even perhaps 'to deal with sin', but *peri hamartias* is the regular way that the LXX refers to the sacrifice of the 'sin-offering' (see, e.g., Lv 5.7-8, 6.25 (LXX/MT 6.18)). So, 'God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and *as a sin offering*'.²² In the OT sin-offering dealt with *unknowing or unwilling* sin. In Rm 7.15, the 'I' (Israel according to the flesh) *doesn't know and doesn't will* what it does. In Rm 9-11, Paul will again stress that his kinsfolk, Israel according to the flesh, '*do not know* God's righteousness' (10.3). Jesus' death has been the means not just of condemning Sin, but of dealing specifically with Israel's plight as well.²³

Jesus' death was the means by which the judicial punishment on Sin itself was meted out. This is not the act of a merciful Son placating a hostile Father. The whole action comes from God in the first place, as in 5.6-10.

²² For full details, see Wright, *Climax*, chap. 11.

²³ NIV implies that God's main purpose was to make the Son a sin offering; sin's condemnation is a separate idea. But that's not what Paul says; the purpose of making him a sin offering was to condemn Sin. At least the NIV does recognize the meaning of *peri hamartias* as 'as a sin offering', however. Most translations relegates this meaning to a footnote, if they catch it at all.

In the Bible, all speech about God's 'son' goes back to Ex 4.22: *Israel* is God's 'son' and, as Israel's head or representative, her anointed king/Messiah is God's 'son' in particular. The OT, though, doesn't speak of God 'sending' his son; rather, God 'sends' his Wisdom, Torah, *Shekinah*, Word, and Spirit— which all embody his own presence and saving power.²⁴ Thus in bringing 'son' imagery together with this notion of 'sending', Paul is identifying Jesus with the very presence and saving power of God. He doesn't speak of the 'second Person of the Trinity', but the way he does speak of God, rooted in Second Temple language about God and his action, blossoms later in the Trinitarian language of the Seven Councils.

The present expression forms the middle term in a crescendo: Rm 1.3-4 and 5.10 refer to Jesus as 'God's son'; 8.3 speaks of God 'sending his own (*heautou*) son'; and 8.32 speaks of God not sparing, but handing over 'his very own (*idiou*) son'.

8.4. The introductory "so that" of this verse (*hina*, as in 5.20 and 7.13), clearly expresses the divine purpose. God's intention is that the *righteous verdict* of the law should be fulfilled "in us." The life the Torah intended, indeed longed, to give to God's people is now truly given by the Spirit. The balance with v. 3 might have led us to expect *dikaiōsis* at this point, but Paul may have chosen *dikaiōma* not least because of its formal balance with *katakrima* in v. 1, exactly as in 5.16. As argued earlier, *dikaiōma* could have referred to behavior commanded rather than to a verdict pronounced; Paul could have said that the intended result of sin's condemnation was that God's renewed people might be able at last to do what the law required. Yet the singular form of the noun,²⁵ taken in conjunction with the thrust of the paragraph as a whole, suggests reference to the law's *verdict* of life.

That 'verdict' would be that of the final judgment described in 2.1-16. The verdict given then will be the one already unveiled in the Messiah (1.16-17). In Paul's underlying narrative here, Torah is the main 'character', and here emerges triumphant.²⁶

Those who find Torah's righteous verdict fulfilled in them— those, that is, who will share in the resurrection life (8.10-11)— do not 'walk' according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The Spirit/flesh contrast, already seen in 1.3-4, will dominate the rest of the paragraph. 'Walking according to

the flesh' (8.4), 'being according to the flesh' (8.5), and being 'in the flesh' (8.8-9) all refer to the status and way of life of those who do not have faith, are not baptized, are not in the Messiah, and are not indwelt by the Spirit. In Rm 9-11, we will see that unbelieving Israel is precisely 'in the flesh' in this sense.

The contrast between 'flesh' and 'Spirit' is not that between 'body' and 'spirit', nor between the 'physical plane' and the 'spiritual plane', or even between 'duality' and 'non-duality'. The Spirit is the agent of 'him who raised Jesus from the dead' (8.11), and it 'dwells in' God's people in the Messiah, just as the *Shekinah* 'dwelt' in the tabernacle. In the wilderness wanderings of God's new liberated people, it is the new pillar of cloud and fire. Once again Paul, as a theologian in the strict sense, is innovating appropriately from within the Second Temple Jewish tradition. The One God of Jewish monotheism is now known in three distinct ways, in and through the Messiah.²⁷ Paul's discourse makes the Church's later language of person and nature, etc both necessary and possible.

The more we allow for *Shekinah* and Temple overtones in what Paul is saying, the more we see that *the resurrection of the body is the rebuilding of the Temple*. But for now, the same Spirit who will raise the Messiah's people at the End, inspires within them in the present a life that will stand at the judgment (cf 1Co 3.10-17), since it conforms to God's will for humankind. Torah is vindicated, the problem of Rm 7 is solved, and the new creation is brought into view, by the Spirit.

8.5-6. Flesh and Spirit are each characterized by a certain manner of thinking. Flesh-thinking is death, whereas Spirit-thinking is 'life and peace'.²⁸ This contrast then develops in 8.7-8 and 8.9-10, as the bridge to 8.11, the climax and conclusion of the paragraph.

Both 8.5 and 8.6 begin with *gar* ('for, because'),²⁹ but in this case both independently explain 8.1-4, rather than 8.6 explaining 8.5: Those who 'walk according to the flesh' (8.4) will find death, because 'being according to the flesh', they 'mind (*phronousin*) the things of the flesh' (8.5a); also, 'the mind (*phronēma*) of of the flesh is death' (8.6a). Likewise, those who 'walk according to the Spirit' (8.4) will find life, because those who are 'according to the Spirit' mind 'the things of the Spirit' (8.5b); and at the same time, 'the mind of the Spirit is life and peace' (8.6b).

²⁴ A classic statement is found in Si 24, where Wisdom, sent into the world, becomes *Shekinah*, dwelling in the Temple, and is summed up in the Mosaic Torah.

²⁵ NIV arbitrarily makes it plural, in order to force the translation to agree with the idea that it's impossible to keep the Torah— now its 'righteous requirements' are fulfilled in us, although somehow this does not require circumcision or kosher, etc; cf 2.27, 13.8-10, 14.1-23, 1Co 7.19.

²⁶ See Wright, *Climax*, 204-8.

²⁷ He says this in a very compressed form in Ga 4.4-7.

²⁸ NEB and REB join the two verses into a single complex statement instead of a two-stage one.

²⁹ NIV omits the connective in both 8.5 and 8.6; NRSV omits it in 8.6; NEB, in 8.5.

But Paul has been using the death/life contrast to talk about the Torah, and so he's not talking about generalities here, but about fulfilling the Torah.

In 12.2, contrasting with 1.22,28, the Christian 'mind' (*nous*) is the initial, and transformative, place of *cosmic* renewal; for the cosmic aspect, see 4.13, 8.19-23. Here, instead of *nous*, he uses *phronēma*, which means 'setting one's mind on something; a way of thinking, an outlook, a mindset; an intention, aim, aspiration, or striving'.³⁰ This is what is changed. They set their minds, they aim and aspire, to something new.

The contrast of death and life is familiar enough, and has been so since at least Rm 5; but why does Paul add 'peace' at this point? In 5.1 he said, 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God'; and he explains in the next verse that the fleshly *phronēma* is 'an enemy toward God' (8.7). The phrase 'life and peace' also carries covenantal overtones, describing the covenant between God and Levi in Mal 2.5.³¹

8.7-8. Rm 8.7 begins with *dioti*, which means 'for' or 'because' (not, as in some translations, 'wherefore' or 'therefore').³² In this section, Paul is saying that

- (a) flesh-thinking is death; Spirit-thinking is life and peace, because
- (b) flesh-thinking is hostile to God, whereas
- (c) Spirit-thinking is at peace with God (thus explaining "peace"), and
- (d) the Spirit is the source of resurrection life (thus explaining "life"); and thus
- (e) indwelt by the Spirit now, you are assured of resurrection life in the future.

But he abbreviates this train of thought to (a) (8.6), (b) (8.7-8), and (d)+(e) (8.9,11), leaving out a link (in this case, (c)), as he sometimes does, that he assumes you can fill in on your own.

He does explain stage (b) quite fully: 'the thinking (*phronēma*) of the flesh is at enmity with God; because it's not subject to God's Torah, because indeed it can't be; and those who are in the flesh can't please God' (8.7-8).

Taking up the idea of 'enemies' from 5.10— 'if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life'— and that of the 'flesh' from 6.19 and 7.5,18,25, Paul

³⁰ *Phronēma* occurs in the NT only in 8.6,7,27, and in the OT only in 2Mc 7.21 and 13.9.

³¹ See also the 'covenant of peace' in Nm 25.12; Isa 54.10; Ez 34.25; 37.26; Si 45.24. The prophetic passages in particular are full of overtones that are interesting for Rm 8.

³² NRSV's 'for this reason' is unwarranted. *Dioti* normally means 'because' or 'for'. The only places in the NT where it means 'therefore' are Ac 13.35; 20.26 (see BDAG).

locates the problem in the *phronēma* (intention; mindset) of the flesh. He then explains this (8.7b, with *gar*, 'for, because'),³³ by saying that flesh-thinking doesn't submit to God's Torah, again explaining (*gar*) that indeed, it cannot. Rm 7 has made clear, the 'flesh' serves 'the Torah of Sin', however much 'Sin's Torah' paradoxically turns out to be God's Torah as used by Sin.

'God's Torah' is clearly a positive thing to which humans ought to submit, not the quasi-demonic 'law' or 'nomism' or 'religion' imagined in post-Lutheran schemes. The Torah is God-given, glorious, and spiritual, but there's a mismatch between it and the 'I-Israel who is 'fleshly, sold under Sin' (7.14), and isn't in accord with 'God's Torah'. The omitted stage (c) of the argument is that Spirit-thinking will fit the Torah, as Paul has already suggested, for example in 2.25-9 ('circumcision of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter'); in 10.4-11 ('the word is close to you, even in your mouth and in your heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach'); and 13.8-10 ('he who loves another has fulfilled the Torah'), and maybe also 3.27 ('Torah of faith').

Paul's final and most revealing comment about flesh-thinking (8.8) is that 'those who are in the flesh' can't please God.³⁴ Evangelical commentators tend to say that the idea of 'pleasing God' leads to trying to 'earn salvation', whereas we're saved by 'faith alone', but Paul had no such scruples (see, e.g., 12.2; 14.18; 1Co 7.32; 2Co 5.9; Ep 5.10; 1Th 4.11). Those in the flesh can't please God; but those in the Spirit can and do.

8.9-11. Paul says his readers are 'in the Spirit' now; no longer 'in the flesh'. God's Spirit dwells in them; the result is that they are assured of final resurrection. Rm 8.11 thus gives the complete answer, only anticipated in 7.25a, to the question of 7.24 ('who will deliver me from the body of this death').

We need to note three levels of complexity in these verses:

First, what's the difference between being 'in the Spirit' and the Spirit being 'in us'? The Spirit's dwelling 'in us', of course, evokes the idea of the *Shekinah* dwelling in the tabernacle (cf 1Co 3.16; 6.19, etc.). Our own being 'in the Spirit', on the other hand, bespeaks a condition or situation that contrasts with being 'in the flesh'. The contrast seems to be a bit ad hoc— Paul doesn't talk quite this way elsewhere, although he speaks of thoughts, prayers, and actions as taking place 'in the Spirit' (e.g., 9.1, 14.17, 15.16).

In one context, then, 'Spirit' contrasts with 'flesh', as a mode of being. In another, 'Spirit' contrasts with 'Sin', as a power

³³ Omitted by both NIV and NRSV.

³⁴ Here, 'in the flesh', 8.9, means the *same* as he just said in 8.4-5 as 'according to the flesh'. But see 2Co 10.3 and by implication Ga 2.20, which speak of being 'in the flesh'— 'still living as a human being this side of the grave', while not conducting life 'according to the flesh'.

dwelling in us. In yet another, 'Spirit' contrasts with 'Torah', as a phase of God's plan.

Second, Paul switches between saying 'the Spirit' and saying 'the Messiah' dwells in you. He also calls one and the same Spirit 'God's Spirit' and 'the Messiah's Spirit'— an interesting indication of the status that the Messiah has for him!— based on what aspect or dynamic he's emphasizing at any given moment.

Third, Paul calls Jesus 'the Messiah' when he's stressing the solidarity between him and his people within God's plan, and just 'Jesus' when he means the historical person as such.

Rm 8.9, then, introduces the final argument that will lead to the triumphant conclusion of 8.11. He has been talking about being 'in the flesh' (8.7-8); now he says, 'You [plural] are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit' (8.9a), precisely because 'God's Spirit dwells in you' (8.9b)— 'if after all' or 'if indeed' that's the case (*eiper*).³⁵ If there's a shadow of doubt here, it's within a basic affirmation; the doubt, if any, is expressed in the last clause: 'but if anyone [singular] doesn't possess the Messiah's Spirit, that person doesn't belong to him'. 'Being in the Messiah' and 'belonging to the Messiah' are the same— that's clear from Ga 3.27-29; these are just different ways of denoting God's people as redefined around the Messiah. But Paul's strong sense that we are saved as *church* is balanced by an equally strong sense that each member of church is personally indwelt by the Messiah's Spirit.

If, given all that he's said about the Messiah up to this point, it's true that 'the Messiah is in you' (8.10a)— if, in other words, the Spirit you have in you is the Messiah's own Spirit— then we're in a handsome position.

Paul speaks more often of Christians being 'in the Messiah', not of having 'the Messiah in you'. The latter phrase, which he's using here in 8.10a, always refers to the indwelling of God's power— spoken of as Messiah or Spirit— to empower and transform us both now and in the future (see Ga 2.20; 4.19; Ep 3.17; Col 1.27). When he says we are 'in the Messiah' (esp 6.1-14), he means that we have *bodily solidarity with him so that his death and resurrection have become ours as well*. But since the Messiah, or his Spirit dwell in us, then our dwelling in him is a matter of actual 'life' (the topic in Rm 7-8), as well as of *status* ('righteousness', the topic in Rm 5-6) (8.10c).

This is true even though 'the body [is] dead because of Sin' (8.10b). Even though we remain subject to decay and death, living in 'the body of humiliation' (Ph 3.21) or even 'the body of this Death' (7.24)— 'the Spirit is life' in us and for us— Paul means 'Spirit' (of God) here, as in NRSV and REB, not

(human) 'spirit', as in most translations³⁶— 'because of righteousness', that is, because God has acquitted us (8.10c).

8.11. The last verse of 7.1-8.11 is the goal of the whole argument that began in 7.1 and the foundation that will take us through to 8.30 and beyond.

The point is straightforward: 'if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised the Messiah from the dead will make your mortal bodies alive as well, through his Spirit indwelling in you.' (8.11).

At the very end of the first section of the letter (Rm 1-4), summing up his whole train of thought at that point, Paul referred to God as 'him who raised Jesus from the dead' (4.24). He repeats this now, *twice*, the second time significantly changing 'Jesus' to 'Messiah'.

'Jesus' is the individual human being and 'Messiah' the one who royally represents his people, so that what is true of him is true of them. Jesus, the Messiah, is the first-fruits (cf Col 1.18), the first whom he raised from the dead, and all who belong to him, he will raise as he raised Jesus, his Messiah. Like Jesus' own resurrection, our resurrection will be God's own act, by the Spirit. In fact it will be the same act, by the same Spirit, for we are 'in the Messiah Jesus' (8.1).

In 6.4 Paul said that Jesus was raised by the *glory* of the Father. In 1Co 6.14 he said that God raised the Lord, and will also raise us, by his divine *power*. Now, in 8.11, he says that God will accomplish this by his *Spirit*. In Ph 3.20-21, he says that 'the Lord Jesus Christ... will transform the body of our lowliness to be conformed to the body of glory, according to the energy of his ability to subject all things to himself' Thus in 8.30, Paul will say, 'those whom he justified, them also he glorified'.

So this is the final answer to 7.24b: Who will deliver from this body of death? Who, in other words, will give life to the dead? The Torah, though holy, just and good, could not, but God will do so, through the Messiah and by the Spirit— thus accomplishing what the Torah promised (Lv 18.5; Dt 30.15-20) but could not perform.

For the Jew— for Paul himself prior to his conversion— membership in the covenant whose outward badges were circumcision and Torah was the basis of confidence of being on the right side of God's judgment. God would once again act within history, as he did at the exodus, to deliver Israel. Throughout this whole section (Rm 5-8), Paul has been retelling the story of the Exodus, Israel's freedom story, demonstrating that the twin Pharaohs, Sin and Death, to which Israel and indeed the whole human race were still in bondage, have been decisively defeated through the Messiah's death. Like the pillar of fire, the Spirit has led God's redeemed people through the saving waters of Baptism to

³⁵ Compare 3.30 or 8.17. NIV's 'if' is too doubtful, and NRSV's 'since' is too certain.

³⁶ See Wright, *Climax*, 202; Fee, *Presence*, 500.

the inheritance given to Adam, and lost, and promised again to Abraham. Faith and baptism, not Torah and circumcision, have renewed and marked out God's eschatological people. All this has happened first in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and the indwelling of his Spirit now distinguishes those who are his from those who are not. The sign of the Spirit's work is first and foremost faith (1Co 12.3) and indeed faithfulness; and its fruit is the final resurrection. This is the path from justification to glorification, from 'passover' to 'promised land'.

In the next paragraph (8.12-30), Paul will develop a picture of this journey, drawing on several interlocking images from the exodus story and widening the angle of vision to include, not just humans, but the whole created order.

A final note about 8.11: If this isn't trinitarian, what is? In fact, here we find the essence of trinitarian theology— not abstract 'proofs' about how 'three' can really equal 'one' and vice versa, but a pointer to the Christian experience of God, who raised the Messiah, his son, by his own Spirit, and will raise us with him. *Whenever someone says to you that they don't 'get' the Trinity, point them to this verse and to 8.15, where Paul says, 'you have not received a spirit of slavery again unto fear; but you have received a Spirit of adoption, in which we cry, Abba, Father.'*

Reflections

1. It's important to see this long and central argument (7.1–8.11) as a whole, before drawing small-scale lessons from its different parts, which could otherwise be put to work in service of schemes other than Paul's. That's how we should read *any* scripture, actually. But 7.1–8.11, and its sequel in 8.12-30, go straight to the heart of the identity of God's people.

Israel at its best looked to Torah as the basis of its status as the chosen people of the creator God; Paul insists that Torah informs Israel in no uncertain terms that it's instead just a subset of the people of Adam, in slavery to Sin and facing Death. Israel as well as the Gentiles can find confidence only in the Messiah's death and in the Spirit's life-giving presence and power. The church remains 'Israel', the people whose story goes back to Abraham, and it must tell Israel's story again and again as it reflects on who it is. The Old Testament, in other words, isn't just a story about how ethnic Israel faced some problems which were later taken care of Jesus— told that way, Israel's story might seem remote and irrelevant to Christians living in any subsequent century, let alone two millennia later. Like the story of Jesus itself, which is part of it, Israel's story shows how God's people, the church's forebears, had to pass through the anguish of Rm 7 in order that, through the Messiah and the Spirit, new hope might be born. As Paul tells it, Israel's story is a story of failure— and of how Israel had to embrace the failure, had to learn from it, not just to do better next time, but to realize

that God had something more to say and to do in the program of which this lesson was a vital part.

2. Within the overarching theme of how we find confidence in our salvation, the central character in the story of 7.1–8.11 is the Torah itself. Rm 7.1–8.11 is Paul's classic defense of the Torah against all charges. Torah is holy and just and good; it's not responsible either for Sin, and hasn't become Death for 'me'. But it does make the exceeding wickedness of Sin itself apparent, in that Sin made its nest in it, so that it condemned rather than giving life. But when God acts in the Messiah and by the Spirit to give life, this was, after all, what it had intended all along. Any suggestion that the Torah was or is a shabby, second-rate, primitive, destructive kind of religion, in sore need of being abolished, set aside, and consigned to oblivion in the bright new day of a faith free of 'law' or 'nomism' or 'religion', must be ruled out.

3. But at the same time, against attempts to reinstate Torah, either sabbatarian forms of Christianity or 'messianic Judaism', or in wider social and political contexts like contemporary Israeli society, or American politics— we must insist that the Torah by itself is weak and cannot give life. Torah only accentuates the Adamic, sinful, death-bound position of those who embrace it. Some Christians, eager to insist that the whole Bible is the Word of God, and anxious to avoid Marcionism, fail to heed the words of Jesus and Paul is not the ultimate badge of God's people, and would like to impose their idea of Torah in matters (for instance) like the death penalty, food laws, or homosexuality (but of course not usually regarding circumcision, marriage, or the jubilee-forgiveness of debts). There are even some today, who despite the letter to the Hebrews and indeed the entire temple-based christology and pneumatology of the New Testament, believe that the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem is what God wants for his world. We can't treat God's work as if it had no history. Paul's writings make abundantly clear that in the great narrative of God and the world, Torah is the chapter that runs from Moses to the Messiah (Ga 3 is the classic exposition of this)— but the story started before the giving of Torah and moves beyond it— *and Torah itself celebrates this fact.*

4. As we've tried to insist above, in the famous 'I' passages of Rm 7.7-25, Paul isn't writing so much about the plight of the individual as about the plight of Israel under Torah. Nevertheless we can work outward from what he says about Israel toward the puzzle of general human moral inability. If Israel is like everyone else only more so, then it's perfectly legitimate to reason back to how 'everyone else' is like Israel. Echoing certain pagan philosophers, Paul himself was already saying that when people embrace and affirm moral principles, living up to them proves strangely hard (2.1-16). But even there, his point is not that 'law' is wrong or misleading, but that the human race is 'in the flesh', and the flesh

distorts its best intentions, and law tends only to expose the self-interest at the heart of apparent altruism.

But isn't Rm 7 about everyone's existence— even Christians— rather than just Israel's, then? No. Paul insists (seven times!) that the Christian has died to Sin, flesh, and Torah. True, the saints remain aware of rebellion and unholiness within themselves that will not be rooted out until death or even later. Christian holiness may find itself flawed, but these flaws are not what *Paul* is talking about in Rm 7, even if nearly all of his readers have used his words to talk about that. *Paul's* desire is to place the Roman church on the map of God's historical project, so that it will know exactly what terrain it's standing in.

5. The villain in the drama of 7.1–8.11 is Sin. Sin does not mean acts of rebellion or Torah-breaking, but a *force* at work in the world and in humans. For Paul, 'Sin' occupies the place that 'Satan' holds on other maps. And he speaks of it nineteen times between 7.1 and 8.11, building on the seven occurrences in 5.12-21 and the sixteen in Rm 6. There are only four references in Romans prior to 5.12, two after 8.11, and only seventeen in all the rest of his letters put together. He speaks of 'Satan' only ten times in all of his letters, and only once in Romans (16.20).

6. Those who dislike Paul's analysis of Sin routinely despise his remedy— namely, that on the cross God 'condemned Sin' in the flesh of the Messiah. But at the heart of Christianity, the cross is the way through the Red Sea, leaving behind the Egypt of Sin and Death, and onward to the land of promise. The victory of the cross over the principalities and powers, with Sin and Death as their chiefs, actually frees us from that guilty self-absorption which passes quickly into self-hatred, which 'liberal' denials of sin and guilt are desperate to avoid, and 'conservative' or 'traditional' affirmations of repentance can seem a little too eager to embrace.

God's love is stronger than Sin and Death. 'There is no condemnation' (8.1), nor is there any need to fear judgment— for the *last* judgment is the *same* judgment that was given on the cross. The whole point of Rm 8 has been to substantiate that. Yet it remains perpetually surprising, even to people who have read the Bible their whole lives, and we need to stress it in preaching, liturgy, and pastoral counseling— rather than 'toll booths', 'purgatory', and Hell.

7. Many people deny that we can know whether we are truly saved, and many others proclaim their certainty on every occasion. But it's significant that the greatest step-by-step argument for Christian assurance, of which 8.1-11 is the heart, emerges from the deep wrestling and struggling and cry of despair that Paul places it in the mouth of the Torah-loving, Torah-observant Jew: *Who shall deliver me?* But Christian assurance is built on what has happened in Jesus the Messiah, and on the solid and unbreakable link between the Messiah and his people: *God will deliver me, through*

Jesus the Messiah and by the Spirit. Of this, faith is the sign, baptism the connection, and Spirit the personal guarantee.

8. There is no such thing in New Testament theology as a Christian who doesn't have the Spirit dwelling in him or her.

9. As with Romans as a whole, so with this central passage: it's basically about God. This God's strange work of Torah is darker and more unexpected than either the devout Jew or the serious pagan, or for that matter most Christians, could have guessed. There is more to learn down this line, as Rm 9–11 will disclose. But God has revealed himself not ultimately in the Torah, but in sending his Son. He does not remain distant and detached while we do the hard work, but is personally and intimately present where Sin and Death have been brought to their full height.

10. Without the resurrection, the world at large would continue to believe that might and money and sex were the highest human goods, and that killing people was how to get things done. In fact we still pretty much believe these are the realities. It is time for a genuinely incarnational theology to be let loose again upon the world. The very God who sent his Son gives his very Spirit through his Son. A fully Trinitarian theology, calling forth worship, love, and service, is the only possible basis of life and hope for the world.

F. Led by the Spirit in the Wilderness

8.12-17

Spirit, hope, suffering, glory, and love were the themes stated at the beginning of Rm 5–8, to which Paul has now worked his way back. 'Being therefore justified by faith... we rejoice in the hope of God's glory'; we rejoice in our sufferings, because our hope 'doesn't make us ashamed, because love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (5.1-5).

Rm 8.12-30 celebrates and describes Christian existence as rooted in God's past action in Jesus the Messiah, sustained in the present by the Spirit, and assured of his saving vindication in the future. Those in Messiah Jesus have escaped condemnation (8.1), for those whom God justified, he also glorified (8.30). The exodus theme underlying Rm 5–8 now comes out into the open: what God did for Israel at the Red Sea, what he did for Jesus at Easter, he will do not only for those in the Messiah, but for all creation as well. The covenant was established in order to put the world to rights; now we see how this is to happen.

'Adoption' or 'sonship' is a major theme of this paragraph, running right through 8.14-17,19,21 and triumphantly summed up in the statement in 8.29 that God's purpose was to make Jesus 'the firstborn among many brethren'.

Exodus and adoption lead to inheritance and glory. 'Inheritance', of course, meant the land promised to Abraham and

his family, and promised again to the Israelites after the exile.³⁷ But whereas Gn 15.7,18 spoke of 'this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates', Rm 4.13 spoke of Abraham inheriting the *kosmos*, for that was the original blessing given to Adam (Gn 1.28, 2.15-20). But the *kosmos* is not just an inert object. All of creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's sons, who are to receive precisely this inheritance. And such an inheritance means that those in the Messiah are forever indebted to the God who promises and gives it. That is the note that the paragraph opens with.

The beating heart of the sequence is found in the prayer that the Spirit inspires in God's children (8.15-16, 26-27). The 'Abba' prayer expresses Jesus' own relation to God, and bears witness in our own spirits that we are indeed God's children in and with him. This is balanced by the 'speechless groaning' in which the Spirit calls to the Father within our hearts, longing for the full redemption of all creation. Thus are those in the Messiah conformed to the son's image (8.29), standing between the world's agony and God's love, somehow themselves becoming the vessels and vehicles of that love.

Here is the structure of the 8.12-30:

- 8.12-17 We are in debt to God, because, as his children, we are also his heirs.
- 8.17 We are co-heirs of the Messiah, since, sharing his sufferings, we also share his glory.
- 8.18-21 Creation itself will be renewed when our renewal is made manifest;
- 8.22-27 Meanwhile we are already being adopted through the Spirit;
- 8.28-30 For God is utterly and unalterably purposed to bring all those in the Messiah to their glorious Messiah-shaped inheritance.

8.12-13. Paul quite emphatically (*ara oun*, 'so then') signals that he's about to draw the conclusions that arise not only from 7.1-8.11, but also from Rm 5-6. We thus need to keep his whole argument in view as he does so.

His first point is that Christians are debtors to the God who has made them his sons and heirs. This debt is a cause for gratitude. 'We are debtors' (8.12a), he says— but breaks off to say what we are *not* indebted to: the flesh (8.12b). We will have to work out from the way the argument proceeds who we are in fact indebted to.

Having mentioned the flesh, he recalls the flesh/spirit contrast of 8.5-9, and speaks of a new possibility of life empowered by the Spirit (8.13), which makes us God's children and

heirs (8.14-17). We can 'put to death the deeds of the body' and 'live' (8.13b).

'The deeds of the body', not the body itself, are to be put to death (8.13). The corruptible and mortal bodies aren't what they will be in the resurrection; to make their '(mis)deeds' as the yardstick for what we are is to render ourselves slaves to dust, and to go back to the tyranny of Death. Yet though 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom' (cf 1Co 15.50), the body itself can and will. 'Flesh' is negative, but 'body' is the site where both sin (8.13) and holiness (12.1) are possible— for above all, it is what will be redeemed in the resurrection (8.11).

In the context of the Exodus narrative Paul has been spinning out, Paul is warning God's Israel against going back to Egypt (Ex 16.2-4). In the practical context, he's warning the Romans against going back to their former way of life. In the context of the letter, that means not only Sin, but also Torah.

We must see the death-bound inclinations of the present body for what they are, and anticipate the verdict of the grave by putting them to death here and now, as he taught in 6.12-14. In terms of Torah, which Paul has just spent the last section discussing in terms of 'flesh', the body is 'the body of this death' (7.24). We are delivered 'through Jesus the Messiah our Lord' (7.25), but our work of mortification marks our participation in his death and resurrection.

8.14. The 'for' or 'because' (*gar*) that links 8.14 to 8.13, explains that those who 'kill off the deeds of the body by the Spirit' are God's sons (*huioi*). Israel, God's 'son', also had to be 'holy' (see Dt 14.1; cf Isa 1.2). *Huios*, 'son' (contrast *tekna*, 'children', in 8.16) connotes not only descent, but inheritance. As God's 'son', Israel was also his 'heir'.

The image of being 'led by the Spirit' is taken from Israel's wilderness wanderings, when it was led by the pillar of fire.³⁸ That symbol of God's powerful presence is associated here with the idea of 'leading', just as it was associated with the ideas of 'sending' in 8.3-4 and 'indwelling' in 8.9-11. The Spirit, having been sent, indwells and leads, doing for God's people now what the Shekinah and cloud did in the wilderness— ensuring Israel of her divine adoption and leading her forward to her inheritance. The idea of being God's sons is rooted in the same Exodus narrative (Ex 4.22; cf also Isa 1.2; Ho 1.10; 11.1). As in Ga 4.1-7, the God who sent the Son now sends the Spirit of the Son in order to adopt all as sons in whom the Spirit dwells, who (as here, still within the exodus imagery) are led by the Spirit.

8.15. The Exodus gives depth to the comment that we did not receive a spirit of slavery that would lead us back again into fear; the pillar of fire isn't leading us back to Egypt.

³⁷ See, e.g., Gn 15.7; Nm 34.2; Isa 57.13; 60.21; Ez 36.12; cf Ps 25.13; 37.9.

³⁸ Ex 13.21-22; cf Ex 14.19,24; 40.38; Nm 9.15-23; 10.34; 14.14; Dt 1.33; Ne 9.12, 19; Ps 78.14; 105.39.

Instead, we find ourselves adopted by God, who is thus our father.

Here and in Ga 4.6, Paul says Christians find themselves prompted by the Spirit to call God 'Father'. 'Abba' is the word Jesus himself used in his prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14.36) and, by implication, at other times as well; Paul gives it in Aramaic, but also provides a translation. 'Abba' doesn't mean 'Daddy', as some have suggested; it's the regular Aramaic word for 'Father'. We tend to take it as a term of endearment, but in Paul's day it would much more importantly suggested access, loyalty, solidarity, and inheritance, as the context shows. Israel was God's 'son' (Ex 4.22); addressing God as 'Father' makes one's own all the exodus promises of the Scriptures. It is also a way of making Jesus own prayer one's own, and hence of sharing in the sonship of the Messiah, Israel's true representative. And in Jesus the Messiah, God's true son, God's covenant faithfulness had been revealed for the salvation of all who believe (see 1.3-4,16-17).

8.16. What Paul has just said is astonishing. There are only four places in the Old Testament where God is referred to as 'father', and in none of them does Israel directly address him as such (although later Jewish prayer did, and does). Therefore he reinforces it by insisting that as the Spirit leads us through the wilderness and inspires the cry of 'Abba', our own human spirit confirms that indeed, we are God's children (*tekna*). *Teknon*, 'child', connotes family membership and the ability to rely on the parents' protection.

The OT frequently associates Israel's being 'led' through the wilderness with the theme of Israel as God's son or of God as Israel's father.³⁹

8.17. But if we may rely on our familiarity with God our Father and on his protection and care, we are certainly his heirs. This is the fulcrum about which the whole discourse now pivots. All who are in the Messiah and are indwelt by the Spirit are 'God's children', and if children, then also his heirs. That is how we are indebted to God (8.12)— we are fellow heirs with the Messiah. We share his prayer— a symptom of sharing his sonship— and we will also share in his inheritance. If he is Lord of the world, ruling over it with sovereign and saving love, then we are to share his rule, bringing redemption to the world that longs for it (cf 1Co 6.2-3). But, as Jesus himself solemnly warned, there's a cost (see Mk 8.34-38). The road to the inheritance, the path to glory, is a road of suffering.

Paul has now worked his way back to something he mentioned in the introduction to the whole section (5.3-5): even suffering is a cause for celebration ('boasting'), because it leads to patience and hope (8.18,23-24) for those in whom the love of God is present (8.28). 'We suffer with [the Messiah] so that we may also be glorified with him' (8.17b), for

thus we are 'conformed to the image of God's son' (8.29). Glory— that is, honor from God, granting both access to him and a share in his sovereignty (for which we were designed from the beginning)— plus the splendid form of existence appropriate to that role— was lost because of Sin. But the Messiah has regained it through his resurrection (cf 6.4). That which is true of him is, and will be, true of his people.

G. The Land of the Promise

8.18-30

1. Creation, Old and New

8.18-21

8.18. By way of explanation (*gar*, omitted in NIV and NRSV) of his cryptic bridging statement in 8.17, Paul declares where his calculations⁴⁰ take him. He wants his audience to understand the rationale for what he's saying: The glory that is to be revealed will far outweigh the sufferings that have to be endured in the present (echoing 2Co 4.17). Christians are 'in the Messiah', and their true life is already present; hidden, but waiting to be revealed when the Messiah is finally revealed in glory (Col 3.1-4).

This 'far outweighs' (lit., 'the sufferings of the now-time are not worthy to the coming glory to be revealed to us') corresponds to what he had been saying in 5.15: 'not as the transgression, so also the free gift. For if through the transgression of one [man], many died, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one person, Jesus the Messiah, has abounded toward many'.

However, the preposition is somewhat unexpected, although it's the same as in 5.15: glory is to be revealed 'toward' or 'into' (*eis*) us. We aren't just to receive a vision of glory (NRSV), nor glory appear 'within' us (NIV): the future revelation will bestow glory (honor) upon us, from above, as a gift.

8.19-21. Paul now justifies 8.18 by describing both the glory to be revealed, and the present situation of waiting for it. The first stage of this explanation focuses on something that he's hardly hinted at, up until now (but see 4.13), and hardly mentions anywhere else in his writings, but which he has obviously considered very deeply and highlights precisely here, at the culminating stage of his dramatic argument.

We might have been thinking of salvation as just for us human beings. But all along, it turns out, the entire cosmos has been in view. And this is part of the unveiling of God's righteousness, that covenant faithfulness that always aimed at putting the whole world to rights. This is why, as we saw in 4.13, Paul declared that God's promise to Abraham had the *kosmos* in view.

'For the eager expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of God's sons' (8.19). But why should creation be so eager for this? And how does Paul know?

³⁹ See Dt 8.2, 5; 32.6, 12; Isa 63.14-10; Jr 3.14,19; 31.8-9; Wi 14.3.

⁴⁰ *Logizomai*, 'reckon', the same bookkeeping metaphor as in 3.28; 6.11.

The answer draws on Gn 3 and other Jewish traditions. Creation itself is in bondage, in slavery, and needs to have its own exodus. It has been 'subjected to futility',⁴¹ not deliberately (it did not rebel as humankind rebelled), but because God subjected it to corruption and decay, which are creation's equivalent of slavery in Egypt ('the slavery which consists in corruption', 8.21). God did this precisely in order that, like Torah, creation also might point forward to the new world that is to be.

In the creation story, human beings, made in God's image, were to be God's stewards over creation (Gn 1.28, 2.15-20). After the fall, the earth produced thorns and thistles. Humans continued to abuse their environment, so that one of the reasons why God sent Israel into exile was so that the land could at last enjoy its sabbaths (Lv 26.34-43 [cf 25.2-5]; 2Chr 36.21). But God promised new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65.17; 66.22). If the creator was to be true to his original purpose, human beings would have to be restored to their rightful place at last as God's image-bearers, the wise steward they were always meant to be. This purpose has been accomplished in the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, and will be fully accomplished when those who are in him are raised with him and together set in saving authority over the world (6.4-11; see also 1Co 15.20-28).

The closing words of 8.21 (lit., 'unto the freedom of the glory of the children of God') could mean that creation and Christians will be free and glorious in the same way together. But 'glory' is a property belonging to God and given to humans; it is not given to creation itself (Adam is the priest/king/mediator). Creation will have freedom *because* God's sons have glory; indeed, their glory will consist quite specifically in bringing his wise, healing, restorative divine justice to the whole created order.

Adam was a 'type of him who was to come' (5.14) because glory was to be given him, and creation was to receive its purpose through him, from the beginning. Adam fell, and brought us into corruption. But our present suffering can't compare with our coming glory (8.18) because our suffering is smaller than all creation, which is eagerly waiting for our glory to be revealed.

2. Adoption as Sons

8.22-27

8.22-27. By way of yet further explanation (*gar*; again omitted by NIV and NRSV), Paul states a broader truth about the way the world is, and about Christians within it. These verses stand at the very heart of his theological description of the Christian life, which takes place within both the world that is still needs redemption, and God's redeeming love. Paul draws once more on Jewish tradition, this time for an image of the great tribulation and woe that must come upon the

⁴¹ *Mataiotēs*, 'uselessness, valuelessness, emptiness, futility, purposelessness'.

world. For Paul, this is not an end, but a beginning— 'birth pangs'⁴²— which the world, the church, and, remarkably, even the Spirit undergo. This is the context in which the Roman church awaits its final redemption in patience and prayer. Within his overall argument about our assurance of glorification, Paul needs to explain why things are still so painful— and also why Christians can nevertheless be confident of God's final victory and their final redemption.

8.22. All of creation is groaning together in labor pains. The coming new world will involve, not the abolition of the present one, but a rebirth.

8.23. But how will this rebirth come about? Not by the world's own energy and potential, but through the glorification of God's sons (8.21). That is why, within the groaning creation, 'even we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit— even we ourselves groan within ourselves, awaiting adoption, the redemption of our body' (8.23). Our redemption is 'already and not yet': we have already received 'the spirit of sonship/adoption' (*huiothesia*, 8.15); we are already 'God's children' (8.16-17); and yet there's an 'adoption' for which we still eagerly long. The link between present and future is made, again as usual, by the Spirit, who is the 'first fruits', that part of God's future redeeming power that is brought forward into the present, so that the prayer of the child in the present time (8.15-16) truly points on to the future resurrection glory (8.11,17).⁴³ This idea is close to the idea of the Spirit as a 'down payment' on the full salvation yet to come (e.g., 2Co 1.22; 5.5; Ep 1.14). Here 'the first-fruits of the Spirit' looks back to 8.4b,9-11,13b-17. Summing up here and in 8.26-27, the present 'groaning', though a result of the present not-fully-redeemed state, is at the same time a sign of hope.

The 'adoption' is not just 'spiritual' but precisely the final redemption of the body, as Paul has already explained in 8.11. 'Redemption' (*apolytrōsis*), mentioned here for the first time since 3.24, again carries overtones of the exodus theme that underlies so much of this section. We ourselves have come out of 'Egypt', but our body, which still needs to have its deeds put to death (8.13), is still awaiting redemption from the slave market. The body is intended to be glorious, splendid, fashioned after the model of Jesus' own resurrection body, no longer subject to weakness, humiliation, sickness, sin, and death (cf 1Co 15.54; 2Co 5.1-5; Ph 3.21).

⁴² See Wright, *NTPG*, 277-79; *JVG*, 577-79.

⁴³ Paul can use the same image of the Messiah, as the first to be raised from the dead, guaranteeing the harvest to come (1Co 15.20-23) or of the first converts in a particular location (e.g., Rm 16.5; 1Co 16.1 5). See also 11.16; 2 Th 2.13. In Jas 1.18 Christians are seen as the first-fruits of God's new creation, an idea that sits very comfortably alongside Rm 8.22. For the biblical background, see the Commentary on 11.16.

8.24-25. 'For we were saved in hope'. Not in 'this hope' (NIV)— i.e., of being redeemed; that's true, but it's not the point Paul is making here, as his further explanation makes clear. The logic of these verses, explaining what has gone before, is as follows:

- (a) we ourselves groan while awaiting our complete adoption,
- (b) because we were saved in hope;
- (c) 'saved in hope' means our salvation isn't yet visible;
- (d) the appropriate stance is therefore patient expectation.

Salvation is *already* a reality for the Christian ('we were saved': the tense is aorist, denoting a one-off, past event), *but yet* it carries an inevitable future component. Hope is built in to Christian experience from the start, and remains one of its central characteristics (see 5.2-5; 15.13). But if this is so, Paul is stressing, we cannot expect other than to straining forward for what is yet to come, for what is yet unseen.⁴⁴

So we are called to patience. But patience is not just waiting around. The word for our 'waiting' (*apekdechometha*, 8.25) is the same as creation's 'eager awaiting' (*apekdechetai*, 8.19). Moreover, the grammar emphasizes not 'with patience' (lit., 'through patience', *di' hypomonēs*), but 'eagerly awaiting': 'if we hope for what we don't see, then, through patience, we're eagerly awaiting it' (8.25).

8.26-27. Where is God in all this? God is present in the midst of it, groaning in labor too. The church's groaning, in the midst of the groaning world, is sustained and even inspired by the groaning of the Spirit. These are parallel— 'in the same way' (*hōsautōs*). 'The Spirit helps our weakness', our state of not yet being fully redeemed. The Spirit comes alongside to help (*synantilambanetai*).⁴⁵

As in 8.15-16, Spirit-inspired prayer is a key part of the 'already / not yet' experience of inaugurated eschatology.⁴⁶ The redeemed should be set in authority over the world, and be the agents through whom the cosmos that still groans in travail should be set free. At the moment, however, we are weak, since our bodies— that part of creation for which we have the most immediate responsibility— are still subject to decay and death. In this condition we do not even

know what to pray for, but God will still work through us to bring about the world's redemption anyway. Paul himself reports, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12.7-9). The Spirit will inaugurate genuine humanness within us in the form of holiness (8.12-14) and the *Abba*-prayer (8.15-16), and to anticipate that genuine humanness, trusting God and so being set in authority over the world, through prayer.

Many have suggested that by 'speechless groanings' Paul means 'speaking in tongues' (*glossolalia*). But the words he uses for that come from *laleō*, 'to speak, make a noise, give sound' (see, e.g., 1Co 12.30; 13.1; 14.2), and he's speaking here of groanings that are *alalētois*, literally 'not-*laleō*'— i.e., 'speechless' or 'voiceless'. But the Spirit itself intercedes within us precisely at the point where we find no words to express in God's presence the sense of futility (8.20) and the longing for redemption. These inarticulate but Spirit-assisted groanings come before God as true prayer, true intercession.

Here, Paul uses another remarkable paraphrase for God (see 4.24, 8.11): 'the heart-searcher'. The Spirit's own 'intent' (*phronēma*, cf 8.6), deep within the human heart, is known to the heart-searching God. Rm 2.16, 1Co 4.5, and 1Th 2.4 all mention that the heart's secrets will be laid bare at the future judgment. Thus this verse seems like another example of Paul's 'already / not-yet' inaugurated eschatology: God's present searching of hearts anticipates the final investigation and just judgment of all things (see also Hb 4.12-13).

The Spirit, he says, intercedes for God's people, 'the saints' (cf 1.7); he often designates Christians thus, set apart for God, and this is a particularly appropriate context to do so, as God's people are caught up in his inner life. The Spirit's intercession is 'according to God's will' (lit., 'according to God'). This hints at something deeper than just praying in the way God wants or approves; God's own life, love, and energy are involved in the process. Paul has spoken in the immediate context of God and Spirit, the first and third persons of the Trinity. In 8.29 he will say that the suffering of the church, groaning in longing and prayer for the redemption of the world, and of the present body, is the means by which Christians are 'conformed to the image of God's son' (8.29). Precisely at the point of weakness and uncertainty, of inability and struggle, the Christian becomes the place at which the One God is revealed tri-personally.

3. Adam's Glory Restored 8.28-30

8.28. Rm 8.28 doesn't represent a completely new thought (as implied by paragraph divisions in NIV and NRSV), and it's not just a devotional aside about the wonderful workings of providence. It's bound tightly to the sequence of the argument. The conjunction (*de*) that connects it to the previous thought can be translated 'and', 'but', 'so', etc, but in

⁴⁴ See Ph 3.13; 2Co 4.18. The present passage makes it clear that the 'seen' and 'unseen' things in 2 Corinthians are present and future, not (in a Platonic fashion) the world of space, time, and matter, on the one hand, and the world of spirits, angels, and ideas, on the other.

⁴⁵ The word *Martha* used in Lk 10.40 to say what Mary should have been doing for her.

⁴⁶ In Zc 12.10, in the context of the coming great judgment, God promises to pour out on the house of David, and on Jerusalem, 'the spirit of grace and supplication', which will produce mourning in the midst of the promised glory.

any case, it marks only a slight shift of gears. The train of thought is, 'he who searches hearts knows what the intent (*phronēma*) of the Spirit is, because it makes intercession for the saints according to God. But we know that for those who love God, he works all things together for the good...' (8.27-28).

KJV says, 'All things work together for good to them that love God'. This has become a stock expression in our language like 'To be or not to be' or 'Once upon a time'. But Paul doesn't normally give theological prominence to something like 'all things', even when he's talking about providence. The unspoken subject is better understood as continuing from the previous verse— namely, 'the heart-searcher', God: 'we know that for those who love God, he works all things together for the good' (8.28)— and the thought continues, 'those he foreknew...' (8.29).

The whole letter has been about God, his covenant faithfulness, the good news he has unveiled in his Son and Spirit, and above all—his love and the certainty that this love will win out in the end. That, indeed, is the theme that is now emerging as the major subject of the end of the chapter. We are debtors, he says, to God, from whom we have received the Spirit of sonship/adoption, and from whom we shall receive inheritance, glory, and sonship/adoption in its full form; and the move from present to future is totally secure because God works all things together for good to those who love God', which is, of course, the most basic command of Torah— 'Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH is One; and you shall love YHWH your God...' Paul has already alluded to the *Shema*— the key Jewish prayer— more than once in the letter (1:5; 3:30; 5:5). Now he comes back to it, with a hint of the positive side of the equation of which 8:7-8 was the negative. Those in the flesh do not and cannot submit to God's Torah; they cannot please God; but those in the Spirit now do what the Torah commanded but could not produce. They love God from the heart (cf 1Co 2:9; 8:3). Just as Paul can vary his epithets for God, so here he pulls out a new epithet for the people of God in the Messiah and by the Spirit: they are the 'God-lovers' (*tois agapōsin ton theon*), in other words, the true Torah-keepers, the true Israel.

This epithet, the 'God-lovers', is again not a new idea introduced into the passage, but sums up 8.15,26-27. In 8.15, those who are led by the Spirit are taught to address God as 'Father'. In 8.26-27, those who groan as they await their redemption discover in the depths of their own hearts the Spirit's own cry of faith, hope, and love to God. The work of the Spirit (5.5) qualifies them to be described in this way. It is as though Paul had written: 'because the Spirit intercedes for God's people, who call from their own hearts with his love toward God; and for those who thus love him, God works all things together for good'.

This same people can also be described with another Israel-epithet: 'called according to God's purpose'. God's purpose is 'to bring all things together under the Messiah as head' (Col 1.25-20; Ep 1.10), 'that God might be all in all' (1Co 15:28). This is what will happen when creation is liberated into the freedom of the glorification of God's children— for this purpose was always to be fulfilled through God's image-bearing children, the human race. It has been decisively fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah (5.12-21), and God intends to consummate it in and through those in the Messiah. They have been called for a purpose— to show forth the praises of the one true God in all the world (cf Ep 1. 11-12; 1P 2:9). And— this is still the thrust of 8.28— those who find themselves in this category can be assured that God will accomplish his purpose.

8:29-30. To complete the argument from justification to glorification that began with 5.1-2, Paul goes back behind justification itself to God's purpose and call, and behind that again to his foreknowledge. God's purpose is the overriding thought of these verses, summing up the line of thought particularly from 8.17: God's plan was always to create a Messiah-shaped family, a renewed human race modeled on the Son (once again the line of thought from 1.3-4, through 5.6-10, to 8.3 emerges at a crucial point in the argument). Heirs of God, said Paul in 8.17, and *fellow heirs with the Messiah*: fellow children, younger siblings of the Firstborn (see Col 1.15,18). This would come about through a process of God's adopted children being shaped according to the likeness of the Son. This process will be complete only when the body itself is transformed in resurrection (cf 1Co 15:51-55), at the Lord's coming (Ph 3:21), but it begins here and now precisely through the holiness, suffering, and prayer of which Paul has written in the preceding verses (see also 2Co 3.18).

This process will bring God's renewed people to the point where they reflect the Son's *image*, just as the Son is the true image of God (2Co 4.4; Col 1.1 5; 3.10). Adam was 'the type of him who was to come' (5.14), but he failed. But the Messiah succeeded, and those in him are on their way to becoming the true, renewed human beings God intended them to be. This is the point, at last, to which the long argument beginning with 1.18 was looking forward. God's image, distorted and fractured through idolatry and injustice, is restored in Jesus the Messiah, God's son; and the signs of that restoration are visible in those who, like Abraham, trust in God's life-giving power and so truly worship and give glory to God (4.18-22), and are conformed to God's own image, or rather, that of his Son. As true image-bearers, they are reflect that same image into the world, bringing to creation the healing, freedom, and life for which it longs (8.18-21).

That, indeed, is the thrust of 8.28-30. Unfortunately, the history of interpretation have tried to turn these verses into

an abstract theory of personal predestination and salvation. But God's purpose for those in the Messiah is precisely Messiah-shaped. They are chosen and called in order to advance God's purpose in and for the world. The five great verbs (foreknown, foreordained, called, justified, glorified), crashing chords at the end of the movement, are *all* Messiah-shaped. What is true of the Messiah is true of his people.

Reflections

1. The main emphasis of 8.12-30 is on the life of those who are indebted to God because he has adopted them as his sons and heirs. Because of what this adoption is, their indebtedness isn't a diminution, but an enhancement of full human dignity. Human beings are made in God's image and remade in the image of his son. In the midst of this, Paul speaks of the transformation and liberation of all creation.

2. A key metaphor is that of rebirth, and the bracing ethical imperatives of 8.12-14 and the call to groaning in prayer in 8.26-27 make it clear that we are to embody the tension of bringing the new to birth already within the old. The challenge of bringing everything under the saving rule of the Messiah must begin with the *Abba*-prayer and the Spirit's speechless groanings, the mortification of the misdeeds of the body, and on toward 'taking every thought captive to obey Christ' (2Co 10.5), so that one acquires the intent (*phronēma*) of the Spirit.

3. Creation is to be renewed, not abandoned. That work has already begun in the resurrection of Jesus, but it did not end there. We don't just consign it to acid rain and global warming as we wait for Armageddon to destroy it altogether. We must be and bring, in the present time, signs and foretastes of God's eventual full healing to bear upon the created order in all its parts and at every level. Social and ecological responsibility are part of our priesthood.

4. The redemptive value of suffering has all too often been preached by the comfortable to the uncomfortable, by the elderly to youth going off to war, by masters to slaves, by men to women. At the heart of Paul's picture of the suffering church is the fact that, as he says in 8.10, 'the Messiah is in you'. Christian suffering is somehow 'messianic', which means it's somehow, in ways that will rightly and inevitably pass our comprehension, redemptive. But we are not to impose this vocation on others. We must assume it ourselves.

5. Characteristic of Rm 5-8 as a whole, Jesus is seldom mentioned in 8.12-30, yet he's everywhere present as the pattern that shapes and undergirds the whole paragraph. We are 'fellow heirs with the Messiah' (8.17), 'conformed to the image of [God's] son' (8.29). It would not be fanciful to see Gethsemane standing behind 8.18-27, if not consciously, then at least in way the early church read these words (see Hb 5.7-9).

6. The rootedness of Paul's entire discussion in the exodus story shows a pattern of Christian reading of the Old Testament that is neither purely historical nor purely allegorical. It's important that we see the original events in their own right, as the formative events of the people of Israel. But the exodus story also functioned as a template for the expectation that God would accomplish something new, for which the original exodus would be both the historical starting-point and the pattern. Paul understood this to have happened already in Jesus' death and resurrection, and in the sending of the Spirit, by which the church was enabled to go forward to the promised land of new creation.

We can give due weight to original meanings and contexts of the Old Testament, while yet understanding, as the distinctively Christian meaning, that the new exodus—the resurrection and transformation of the whole created order—has happened, and is still to happen in Jesus. This is at least part of what it means to say that Jesus' death and resurrection happened 'according to the scriptures' (1Co 15.3-4).

H. Nothing Will Separate Us from God's Love

8.31-39

Both the style and the content of 8.28-30 show that Paul's argument in Rm 5-8 is done. What remains is to celebrate—to 'boast over the hope of God's glory' (5.2,11)—in a way that draws together the threads of all that has been said in Rm 1-4 as well as 5-8, which is why justification (5.1), as well as glorification (5.2) plays a strong role in this concluding passage.

The theme that emerges with particular strength is God's love. Paul spoke of God's love in 5.5-8, but this is only the second time he has mentioned of it. An overemphasis on Paul's justification (legal) terminology has thus led some to feel that Paul is lacking in love compared to John, but John's gospel is itself replete with lawcourt language and imagery, and more importantly, the fact that love is the main theme of Paul's concluding summary shows that his whole argument has been about God's love all along.

The argument of this paragraph is, in fact, the same as that of 5.6-10: God's love has done everything in the Messiah, and no power can shake turn it aside, even Death itself.⁴⁷ God's love is our ultimate assurance, stronger than logic. Not much is added to that earlier passage here, which increases the sense we had (see the notes) that 5.1-11 was an advance statement of the entire argument of 5-8. Rm 8.31-39 is the performative expansion of 5.11: 'we boast in God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom we have now received the reconciliation'.

⁴⁷ Cf 1Co 15.20-28.

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions, each followed by a statement that shows that the answer to the question must be 'nobody'. The first Q&A is broad, introducing the set; the following three fill out and explain the first. The last two verses explain and celebrate the answers just given, rounding off the whole of Rm 5–8 (and even 1–8) with rhetoric and solemnity:

(A) *Introductory: If God is for us, who is against us?*

[Nobody, because] God, having not spared his Son, will now give us all things (8.31-32).

(B) *God: Who shall bring a charge against us?*

[Nobody, because] God is the justifier (8.33).

(C) *Messiah: Who shall condemn us?*

[Nobody, because] the Messiah died, was raised, and now intercedes (8.34).

(D) *Church: Who shall separate us from God's love?*

None of the possible candidates, because as God's faithful people we are victorious 'through the one who loved us' (8.35-37).

(E) *Summary:*

Nothing can separate us from God's love in the Messiah (8.38-39).

The 2-3-4 sequence (8.33-37) has a kind of trinitarian shape. The Spirit isn't mentioned but, in the light of 8.12-16 and 8.26-28, the Spirit is the one through whom God's love enables those in the Messiah to be 'more than conquerors'.

Within this structure, Paul has created a remarkable web of biblical allusions and echoes, summoning up three passages in particular.

8.32 echoes the story of Abraham and Isaac in Gn 22. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only beloved son is the reason for God's greatest blessings on him; here, God's actual sacrifice of his only Son demonstrates a love that will stop at nothing. In some rabbinic traditions, Gn 22 anticipated the events of Passover night and perhaps even the Day of Atonement, providing God with justification for forgiving Israel's sins and liberating her from slavery. Remarkably, Paul managed to write a whole chapter about Abraham (Rm 4) without mentioning this incident. Now he does so, not, as in some Jewish traditions, to highlight Abraham and Isaac's achievement, but to contrast God's powerful love in going even further than Abraham had done.

The second allusion is to the (so-called) Third Song of the Suffering Servant in Isa 50.4-9. Christian tradition has understood the Songs of the Suffering Servant in relation to Jesus himself, and Paul himself seems to have this in mind in Ph

2.6-8. But in 8.33-34 it's the church that takes on the role of the Suffering Servant, standing before hostile adversaries, trusting in God, and awaiting vindication. However, it's precisely 'in the Messiah' that the church takes this stance. Paul's point throughout Rm 5–8 is that the identity of the church lies in the Messiah. The Messiah's heavenly intercession in 8.34 alludes to the Fourth Song (Isa 53.12); as does the reference to 'sheep for the slaughter' in 8.36 as well.⁴⁸

At the same time, in declaring that the Messiah is now 'at God's right hand', Paul summons up Ps 110.1, one of the most frequently cited passages in early Christian exploration of Jesus' status.⁴⁹ Jesus now shares the very throne of God; and his place at God's right hand is an encouragement to the suffering church, both because he intercedes on her behalf and because his location assures her eventual vindication.⁵⁰

In 8.36, the fifth biblical reference is an explicit quotation of Ps 44.22 (43.23 LXX), in which we've already heard an echo of the Fourth Servant Song (Isa 53.12): 'for your sake we are being killed all day long; we are reckoned as sheep for slaughter'. This psalm begins by celebrating God's love for Israel as seen in her great victories over her enemies, looking back to the exodus story and leading to the claim that 'we have boasted in God continually' (44.8). But then the psalm turns to complaint: everything has gone wrong, the enemies are prevailing, and Israel is covered with shame (8.9-16). But this isn't because of Israel's disloyalty; this time at least, Israel isn't guilty. God knows the secrets of the heart (cf 8.21). Rather, it's 'for your sake' that 'we are being killed all day long, and counted as sheep for the slaughter'. It is precisely by being loyal to YHWH that Israel has pulled down the wrath of the pagan nations upon its own head. Therefore, the psalm concludes, it's time for God to wake up and act, to help and redeem. It is time for God's own covenant faithfulness to be unveiled in action.

The idea that it's somehow God's purpose that 'we are killed all the day long' fits so closely both with the servant allusion in 8.33-34, and with the christological focus of the whole chapter, that we can go further and suggest that Paul is here reflecting again what it means to be 'conformed to the image of the Son', and to share the Messiah's sufferings and glory (8.17,29). Paul himself has to face charges of being a disloyal Jew, and his own sufferings are the result not of infidelity but precisely of fidelity.

By this complex web of allusion and quotation, Paul underscores his basic contention from 3.21 onward that those

⁴⁸ Cf Isa 53.7. See Hays, *Echoes*, 63: The people of God are suffering with the Messiah, so 'upon them is the chastisement that makes others whole, and with their stripes is creation healed'.

⁴⁹ See Wright, *JVG*, 508 n. 116.

⁵⁰ See Mk 12.35-37 and par.; 14.62 and par.; Ac 2.33-34; 7.55-56; Ep 1.20; Col 3.1; Hb 1.3; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2; 1P 3.22; Rv 3.21.

who believe in Jesus the Messiah, who respond with trust to 'him who raised Jesus from the dead' (4.24, 8.11), are the renewed Israel of God. They are Abraham's true children, the true servant people, the people who claim and sing as their own the psalms of the covenant. Law, prophets, and writings bear witness to the fact that, amid suffering and oppression, the One God of Israel has, in long-promised redeeming love, reconstituted Israel in and around Jesus the Messiah. All who belong to Jesus are the true people of this one God.

Thus is concluded the thesis of Rm 5–8. Thus is concluded, too, one part of the argument of 1.18–8.39. And thus is formed once again the great question that takes up the other part, and will lead into some of Paul's densest argumentation: what then about Israel according to the flesh?

8.31. By adding 'about all this' to 'What then shall we say?' (compare 3.1, 4.1, 6.1), Paul is inviting responses to the argument he has just completed, rather introducing logical corollaries that might follow.

The opening challenge says it all: 'if God is for us, who can be against us?' The statement that 'God is for us' is about as basic a summary of the good news as one could have. Elsewhere Paul uses 'for us' as a basic way of explaining the death of Jesus.⁵¹ 'Who is against us?' clearly expects 'nobody'; but there are candidates to consider, once Paul has amplified this basic statement. But Paul stands as a Jewish-style monotheist: there's one God, and if this God is on our side, then no force on earth or elsewhere can ultimately stand against us.

8.32. God's willingness to give up his only Son is the key evidence for his utter reliability. This fills out, exactly as we would have expected from 5.6–10, what is meant by God's being 'for us', and that passage explains the rhetorical question that now emerges: 'How will God, then, not also give us all things with' his only Son? (8.32). If God has done the hard part, there will be no problem with the easy part. For 'give' Paul uses *charizomai*, the quite rare verb form of *charis*, 'grace'. Instead of amplifying the negative ('who can be against us?', 8.31b), he now moves to the positive: God will give us everything (8.32b). This picks up the theme of inheritance (8.17–25), and indeed the theme of 'indebtedness' (8.12). The world as a whole belongs to the Messiah and hence to those who are his. 'All things are yours' (1Co 3.21–23).

8.33–37. The answers are now oblique because they are not offering candidates but saying that God will not lay a charge against his elect; nor the Messiah condemn. So who, then, will separate us from the Messiah's love? (8.35).

Since 8.33 mentions 'God' (the Father) and 8.34 the 'Messiah', we might expect 8.35 to say, No one can separate us

from God's love, because the Spirit has 'poured out love for God into our hearts' (5.5). But he holds off on the Spirit until the very end (8.39), listing instead a number of possible agents of separation (8.36) and then saying: No, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (i.e., through the *Ḥōn*, because *dia* + genitive = 'through the agency of') (8.37).

In 2.1–16 the whole human family faced the judgment of God; in 3.1–18, the Jews were found guilty; in 3.19–20 the whole world was in the dock, with no defense to offer against massive charges. Now in 8.33–34 we're back in court, looking around for our accusers, and finding none. In fact the verdict has already been pronounced by a judge whose righteousness has been fully displayed. He has declared those in the Messiah, marked out by faith, 'righteous'— i.e., he has 'vindicated' or 'acquitted' them. This is the *final* judgment— the one that will come on the *last day*, as in 2.1–16 and 8.1, but it has already been rendered in the *present standing* of God's people, who know that 'those he justified, he also glorified'.

These questions echo the Third Servant Song (Isa 50.4–11)—

'He who vindicates [or: 'justifies'] me is near;
who dares to argue with me?
Let us confront each other!
Who is my accuser?
Let him challenge me!' (Isa 50.8)

Even supposing any charges could come to trial, every thought of a negative verdict is extinguished by the Messiah (8.34). His death was the condemnation of Sin (8.3); his resurrection, the announcement that Sin had been dealt with, and hence the achievement of justification (4.24–25; 1Co 15.17). His glorification is the glorification of his people (8.17, 29–30). And, Paul adds— an idea familiar from the letter to the Hebrews (7.25; 9.24) and the first letter of John (2.1), but occurring only here in his writings— the Messiah is currently interceding at God's right hand for those he represents— which again echoes the work of the Servant in the Fourth Servant Song (Isa 52.13–53.12, final verse).

The Messiah's love is the unbreakable bond between God and the believer, cf Ga 2.20 ('the Messiah loved me, and gave himself for me'; see also 2Co 5.14; Ep 3.19). So Paul's final question is, 'Who can separate us from the Messiah's love?' (8.35).

His response has the form of a triumphal procession: First, the victors: 'we are more than conquerors' (8.37). Following them, a parade of formidable enemies who have been beaten and taken prisoner (8.38–39a; cf Col 2.14–15). At the end, along with 'God' in 8.33b and 'the Messiah' in 8.34b, comes at last the Spirit (39b) in the form of 'God's love in Messiah Jesus'. So the actual answer to the question of 'who can

⁵¹ See 5.6–8; 14.15; also 1Co 15.3; 2Co 5.14–15, 21; Ga 1.4; 2.20; 3.13; Ep 5.2, 25; 1Th 5.10; Tt 2.14.

separate us' is again, 'No one'. Every last one has been beaten.

'But in all these things we are more than conquerors' (8.37a). Some Jews of the period held that suffering was something *because of which* God would deliver.⁵² Certainly, it is something *from* which God would deliver. But Paul says something unheard of: it's something *in which* God would deliver (8.37a). This is what had been shown in Jesus' death and resurrection, and it characterizes the life of God's new-covenant people. As Paul affirms of himself in 2Co 4.7-15 and Col 1.24, our sufferings are taken up into God's purposes, not adding to the Messiah's unique achievement, but embodying it in the world.

So 'we are more than conquerors' (8.37). Like the claim 'God also glorified them', this is a *past* truth about the Messiah, a *future* truth about his people, and hence a *present* reality in faith for those living on the basis of that past and in the hope of that future.

8.38-39. The final *gar* ('for, because') of this section explains a settled conviction ('I am persuaded', 8.38): the one true God has poured out, through Jesus the Messiah, his all-powerful and unbreakable love. Even justice isn't the last word about this God; love is.

In 8.35 Paul listed physical events, threats, and circumstances that might separate us from God's love; now he lists the forces that might stand behind those physical threats. Death itself is the most obvious, at least for a Jew; some parts of the Hellenistic tradition, reflected in some more recent Christian ideas, saw physical death as 'natural', a 'release', a passage to a 'better place', and so forth, but for the Jews and for Paul, Death is the last and greatest enemy (1Co 15.26,54-57), and the Messiah has conquered it.

'Life'— the present life, with all its many delights and problems, might also separate God and the believer. For that, we have the life of the Spirit which can put to death the misdeeds of the body (8.13); we are no longer in the flesh (8.9).

Angels, rulers, and powers are the heavenly beings, corresponding to the 'elements' of Ga 4.3,9 and Col 2.8,20, whose earthly counterparts are the rulers of the nations. These might try to break the bond of love between God and his people, but they are already a defeated rabble (cf Col 2.14-15).

The chapter, and the section, end with the characteristic christological summary that demonstrates, not just Paul's rhetorical skill (cf 5.11, 21; 6.11, 23; 7.25a), but the very height and depth of his entire theology: Nothing 'can separate us from the love of God, which is in the Messiah Jesus our Lord' (8.39). Humans had worshipped what is not God,

ceding power to what was corruptible and could therefore only bring death. Now, humanity has been restored in the Messiah, Jesus; death has been defeated, and creation itself eagerly awaits its final redemption. In the valley of the shadow of Death, those who follow God's Messiah need fear no evil. Though they sometimes seem sheep for the slaughter, yet they may trust the Shepherd, whose love will follow them all the days of their life.

Reflections

1. The security of which Paul has spoken throughout Rm 5–8— the security, that is, of final glorification for all those who are justified by faith— is based firmly on the trinitarian revelation of God in the good news. We need to stress that Paul's theology, agenda, spirituality, faith, and hope are all focused on this very specific God who acted in Israel and her Messiah. We tend to think of 'God' in the abstract, to whom there could be many routes and of whom there could be many equally valid revelations. Paul does not speak of a generalized 'sacredness' that could be encountered in all religious traditions. In particular, he was aware of more than one religious tradition in his day that was demonstrably dehumanizing; the most powerful new religion in Turkey during Paul's lifetime was the cult of Caesar himself— ultimately, the worship of power and money, but this had occult sides to it as well, and it was matched by a flourishing interest in religions of 'mystery' and 'release' such as Mithraism, Isis-worship, and what would eventually emerge as 'Gnosticism'. The way to the confidence and joy of which Paul is speaking isn't through a general or vague sense of religion, or indeed of 'God' or 'enlightenment', but of the specific and focused belief and trust in the One God of Israel— the Father, acting through his Son, rescuing his world by his Spirit.

People often think of the Trinity as incomprehensible today— a philosopher's dense answer to a question no one is even asking ('Prove that 1 = 3'). This is so meaningless. Isn't it better just to quit the game and focus on 'the Sacred'?⁵³

Paul's answer to this is found in passages like—

8.11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised the Messiah from the dead will make your mortal bodies alive as well, through his Spirit indwelling in you.

6.4 We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

⁵² Cf 2 Macc 7.9, 11, where the martyred brothers speak of their deaths as being 'for the sake of God's Torah'. See further Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 579-92.

⁵³ See the winsome but ultimately unconvincing essay of Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997).

—which explore the dynamism of the salvation as an *event* that has an irreducibly trinitarian structure. We need to re-center our own trinitarian faith in this sense of what happened in Jesus, without of course forgetting all that the fathers had to say about it afterwards.

2. 'God will be all in all' (1Co 15.28; cf Ep 1.15-23; 4.10), but this is a task to be *accomplished*. God's task began with Adam's creation, which went off the rails, and then started again with Abraham's call and Israel's long journey, and reached its climax in the presence of God as a human being in the world. This same task is now to be implemented through the Spirit of this Jesus, until creation is filled with God's presence and love 'as the waters fill the sea' (Isa 11.9; Hk 2.14). The *kosmos* is good, but incomplete; God intends to complete it, and thus to liberate it.

3. Christian confidence is kept in place by the Bible. Reading, praying, and singing the story in the Scriptures are key ways that we keep the love of the triune God steadily before us. And as Paul weaves his allusions and echoes of Torah, prophets, and writings into a profound contemplation of God's mighty deeds in the Messiah, we start to see why he says these things were written for our encouragement, 'so that through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures, we might have hope' (15.4).

But we've also seen that Paul's scriptural allusions and echoes are not random proof texts, often with questionable warrant, belong to a *covenant reading* in which God's people from Abraham to the Messiah were the advance guard, not without paradox and ambiguity, of the people now created in the Messiah and the Spirit. To be sure, the Messiah suffered a shameful death just when matters were supposed to reach a climax. But this, Paul insists, was exactly what the covenant God had in mind all along, and God's people today are not a creation out of nothing; they are in fact the family promised to Abraham. How was Israel's God going to fulfill the covenant and deliver Israel? This is the question Paul believed God had answered in the Messiah.

Similar problems in the church must also be answered in terms of life in the Messiah and the victory of the Spirit. God has unveiled his covenant faithfulness in the Messiah, and we must continue to unveil it with him. Our task, in our own use of the Scriptures, is to hear the stages of *Israel's story as our own story*. The events concerning Jesus will inform and guide us through the wilderness *if we learn to think like Israel*. Learning to hear these resonances with discipline and imagination is a major part of Christian teaching and discipleship.

4. The end of Rm 8 offers a description of the kinds of suffering that Paul and his fellow Christians faced in the first century. Only 2 Corinthians 6 and 11, in fact, go into more detail, though the fact of suffering is everywhere apparent. Some of it comes from natural causes, some from violent

opposition, and some from supernatural or cosmic forces. Paul doesn't often speak explicitly about the latter, but throughout his writings we sense a shadow of danger, threat, and struggle with these and other forms.

His response to all this is very different from efforts to attain a higher state of consciousness in which physical pain and suffering are irrelevant and can be ignored. In the *Sutta Nipata*, an early Buddhist text, a disciple approaches the Buddha with a burning question:

'Sir, people are stuck midstream in the terror and the fear of the rush of being, and death and decay overwhelm them. For their sakes, tell me where to find an island, tell me where there is solid ground beyond the reach of all this pain?'

'Kappa,' said the Master, '...I will tell you where to find solid ground. There is an island, which you cannot go beyond. It is a place of nothingness, a place of non-possession and of non attachment. It is the total end of death and decay, and that is why I call it Nirvana. There are people, who in mindfulness, have realized this and are completely cooled here and now. They do not become slaves working for Mara, for death, they cannot fall into his power.'

Paul talks about being 'slaves to Sin and Death', who are even personified, like Mara in the *Sutta*; and about a world subject to 'death and decay' (cf 8.21). His statement that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's regime, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable' (1Co 15.50), or that 'he who sows into his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh' (Ga 6.8a), are in some respects similar to Buddhist discussions of attachment. But his ultimate answers are different: 'What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable' (1Co 15.42), for 'he who sows into the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit' (Ga 6.8b), 'for if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection' (6.5).

So even if the Buddha and St Paul are talking about freedom from the same problem— they're not talking about the same freedom. Paul is concerned with God's justice *for the world*, and he can be concerned with this because of the difference that changes everything: the Messiah's resurrection. Buddhism, both traditionally and ideally, is certainly engaged with justice, but the basis is purely the reduction of suffering and the cultivation of compassion. This juxtaposition of the *Sutta Nipata* and Romans very much highlights the significance of the Christian vision, and what's missing when we're vague about it.

Our spiritual struggles matter not because we will otherwise end up on an endless cycle of miserable rebirth, but because they partake of God's desire to bring his creation into its full splendor. The physical world, even our bodies, are *God's*

world no less than our spiritual reality, and our 'spiritual reality' is no less *created* than rocks and trees. Suffering comes, not just from delusion and karma, but as *birth-pangs*, as a *result* of the good news which, announcing Jesus as Lord, challenges all other lordships.

5. God's love is our ultimate security. The cross is the evidence of how much we are loved— not in a sentimental, emotional sense, but in terms of *God's loyalty to us* (cf 8.31: 'God is for us'). In a world of 'I shop, therefore I am', the challenge of finding our humanity in being *loved*— 'I am loved, therefore I am'— is central.

Interestingly, Paul is already directly challenging the imperial system even in this. Rome thought of its 'secret name' as AMOR, i.e., ROMA spelled backward. But a community founded on, and sustained by, the creator God's sovereign love is a political threat to all the 'loves'— the power and consumption and commerce— of this world.⁵⁴ Citizens within all kinds of systems today need to work out the equivalent in their own terms.

God's love is the deepest truth in the cosmos, and to trust this love is to open ourselves to a richer and fuller humanness— suffering included— than we could ever know in any other way, and to a share in the loving liberation and re-making of the cosmos itself. For it is nothing less than— our resurrection.

⁵⁴ Details in D. E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., WBC 52C (Dallas: Word, 1997) 3.926-27.