

STUDY 25

FREE FROM CONDEMNATION

ROMANS 8:1

EXPOSITION

When we were studying Romans chapter 7, we saw the place of the Law in the preaching of the gospel. Indeed, we discovered that the gospel cannot be preached without preaching the law. There are 5 important functions of the law for both sinner and saint.

Five functions of the Law

The **first** function of the Law is to bring us to a conviction of our sin. The apostle Paul, speaking of his own experience, says this – **Sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the Law sin was dead.** (7:8) Take note of that. Paul is saying that without the preaching of the Law sin is dead. Once he was alive apart from the Law – that is, not spiritually alive but alive in his own estimation. He thought he was righteous before God; but the truth lay in the opposite direction. So, apart from the Law, sin is dead. There is no conviction of sin until the Law is preached; and without conviction of sin there can be no conversion, and without conversion there can be no saving faith, and without saving faith, there can be no salvation. Here is God's method of salvation: the preaching of the Law first, then the application of the grace of the gospel next.

Secondly, Paul goes on to say that, with the coming of the Law, we receive a proper picture of the perfect attributes of God – **So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.** (7:12) We have here three attributes of God; and it is by looking into the perfect law of God that we gain a proper appreciation in our minds and hearts of the nature of God. The Law, then, fulfils this very important function of revealing what God is like. The writer to the Hebrews declares, **Our God is a consuming fire.** We should be serious about God, not treating him lightly. We cannot be irreverent in the presence of God. Like the law, God is holy and just and good.

Thirdly, there is a vast difference between the Law and the gospel. The Law is like a porch on front of a house, but the gospel is like an open door into the house. However, to get into the house, we need first to go through the porch. Now, the Law fulfils this very important function of showing that it is impossible to get into the comfort and safety of the house through the porch alone. The Law never saved anyone. We may come through the Law to the gospel, but we cannot come through the Law to the forgiveness of sins, or to God's mercy, or to God himself. The reason, of course, is that we must keep the Law. The Old Covenant, in which the Law is embedded, describes the failure of the Law to bring anyone to God by his works of righteousness. And the Law has this other function, when convicting us of our sin that we cannot come to him by trying to keep his Law, and by doing good works. We cannot achieve the standard required because we are sinners, and therefore the Law comes and shows us our failure. We really are desperate sinners in the sight of a holy God. So the Law only brings condemnation; never hope, never joy, only a desperate longing to be saved. The Old Covenant was written down by the hand of God on tablets of stone. It

was a written law, written on the heart of the Gentiles, and written on scrolls for the Jews. It was written, and it would save no one. Now, the New Covenant has nothing to do with the Law of the letter, but is the result of the law of grace. Salvation is not earned, as was required under the dispensation of the Law, but is given freely to every repentant sinner coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. The application of the New Covenant belongs to the Spirit. When the Spirit works through the Law, he brings only conviction of sin and condemnation. When he works through saving grace, he brings forgiveness and joy, applying to the sinner all that Christ accomplished on the Cross.

Notice these words – **Now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.** (7:6) We are saved from the system of works that the Law represents. It is finally put to one side. It makes no claim upon the saved sinner, and pronounces no judgement on him. He has removed from one house to another. He has left the stern house of slavery under the Old Covenant for the free house of the new covenant whose owner is Jesus Christ. This illustration is found in the New Testament. (See particularly Galatians 4:21-26)

Fourthly, when we come to Romans 8:1, we discover this wonderful truth – **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** Where Paul says: ... **no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**, he is also implying the opposite; that there is condemnation for those who are under the Law. The agonising state of sinners under the conviction of the Law is described in detail in Chapter 7. There is indeed condemnation for those who are not in Christ Jesus.

The fifth, and final, function of the Law is this: though Paul does not specifically say so in Chapter 7, he certainly implies it in Chapter 8:1, that the Law, revealing itself only as an agent of condemnation and judgement, makes us look desperately somewhere else for salvation – away from our works, our religious observances, our attempts to keep God's Law, and, instead, turn to Jesus Christ. **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** Paul says that Christ is **the end of the Law for righteousness for everyone who believes.** (Romans 10:4). We notice from this expression that the 'end' of the Law ('telos', τέλος, as in 'telescope', pronounced TELL-OSS) is the purpose of the Law, designed to produce perfect human beings. But it fails every time because we are all sinners. That was not true of Christ. And in the life of Christ, where he kept the Law perfectly, we see Man in his perfection. He was a perfect man. That is why Paul wrote, **As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.** (1 Corinthians 15:22) Salvation comes from Jesus Christ alone, but condemnation comes from the Law. The object of the Law is to make us run away from it because we know that we are under its condemnation. We feel that we want to run from the Law because it has found us out. But where will we run to? When we run to Jesus, we find someone who will shield us from all the results of our sin, and prevent the Law from condemning us. **There is no condemnation.** Fix that in your mind – **no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.**

So, now that we have completed the five functions of the Law, let us consider this key word 'condemnation'.

No condemnation.

To understand the New Testament, we preachers need a grasp of the Old Testament on which it is built. There is really no difference between the Testaments, for both speak of the same gospel of the grace of God; the God of the Old Testament is the same as the New Testament; the same merciful and loving God of the Old Testament is also found in the New Testament. The only difference is that the Old Testament predicts the coming of Christ and

the New Testament describes it. The effects of Calvary were just as efficient in the days of the Old Covenant as they are today in the days of the New Covenant. The work of Christ is sufficient enough to save God's sinners from both dispensations. Now, what am I saying is this: to understand this word **condemnation**, we must look back to its origins in the Old Testament. Gospel preachers need to do this with new Christians who have just been convicted of their sin, repented of their sin, have turned to Christ and been filled with joy knowing that they now have a God to whom they may come at any time, and a friend and Saviour in Jesus Christ. Here they are, keen young Christians under your ministry, and eager to learn from the Bible. And the apostle Paul says to them, **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.**

'Condemnation?' asks one of these new Christians. 'What do you mean by condemnation?' It is impossible to speak of condemnation, without an understanding of the Old Testament, and we cannot make people feel that they are under the condemnation of God without preaching to them the Law of God.

We need also to show that the preaching of the Law, and the condemnation it brings, is very much an essential feature of the preaching of the gospel. People might say that the apostle Paul was inventing something, introducing something new into the Christian faith that cannot be found in the Jewish religion. The answer to that is 'Nonsense'. The Bible uses the verb **'to condemn'** 34 times in the Old Testament, and 29 times in the New Testament; 63 occasions in all. **'Condemnation'** is a word used only in the New Testament, 14 times in all. So let us lay our foundation, beginning with the Old Testament.

'Condemnation' in the Old Testament

First of all, let us turn back to the book of Deuteronomy. Condemnation was not something that Paul invented, but it goes back to the beginning of the Jewish faith. It is found in the Torah (the Law, the five books of Moses), in the books of Wisdom, and also in the prophets. It is continued in the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, of course, in the letters of Paul and the other apostles.

Consider these words – **'If there is a dispute between men and they come to court, that the judges may judge, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked.'** (Deuteronomy 25:1) What is being said there? Here are two people in dispute, or perhaps someone has committed an illegal act. They are brought before the court where the judge is there to decide the case, either justifying 'the righteous' (in other words, letting the innocent go free), or condemning and punishing 'the wicked' (that is, pronouncing a verdict of 'Guilty'). The law court is a place where issues are decided, and where no excuses can be accepted. When the judge makes his decision, it is either 'Guilty' or 'Not guilty'; everything is black or white, with no shades of grey in between. There are no other verdicts in the justice of God; we are either 'guilty' or 'not guilty'. If we are found guilty, we go to hell; if we are found not guilty, we go to be with the Lord in heaven. There is nothing in between; that is what the Bible teaches.

Now, the function of the Law is the standard by which we are declared guilty or innocent. If innocent, we will be free from condemnation. If guilty, we will be punished. Whenever the Law of God comes into operation, it does the same thing. It does not make us feel slightly guilty, or fairly innocent. We are either innocent before God under the Law, or, if we have broken the Law even to the smallest degree, we are completely guilty. We are either totally innocent or totally guilty. And the fact of the matter is that, if found guilty, we are as guilty as the worst criminal under the law, for there is no such thing as slightly guilty, or quite guilty, or terribly guilty. There are only two words in the law; 'innocent' or 'guilty'. Those who break even one of God's Law are as guilty as those who have broken them all. (James 2:10)

We gospel preachers have the unpleasant task of informing our congregations that there are no degrees of sinfulness under the Law of God. So, this is the first thing we say – that, if we have committed one sin in our lives, we are as guilty in the sight of God as if we have committed every sin, and are equally to be condemned. It is terrible fact; but that is the function of the Law of God.

Next, we come to Job 10:1-2. Job deals here with something that most people feel at some stage in their life when things go wrong. This is what he says – **‘My soul loathes my life; I will give free course to my complaint. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, Do not condemn me; show me why you contend with me.’** Now, we look around at our modern society and see so much sin, with few, so it claimed, knowing the difference between right and wrong. However, the Bible declares that God’s word is written into the heart of every human being, and that everyone has the faculty of conscience. Conscience has been perverted; but nevertheless it continues to exist. It is very interesting that, like Job, when things go wrong, many people say, ‘Oh, what have I done wrong to deserve all of this?’ When things go wrong, and they can find no real reason for it, they blame God. And yet they had nothing to do with God before that. Now, here is Job, saying, ‘I will say to God, Do not condemn me’. Job’s comforters wanted Job to admit that things had gone wrong in his life because he had sinned. We know that that was a false conclusion, for chapters 1-2 show why Job was so afflicted. These terrible and hard things did not come into his life because he deserved them. He somehow felt that God was condemning him by allowing these things to come to him. Even the most perverted of people sometimes come out with astonishing statements that reveal the fact that there have a conscience deep down inside them. The voice of conscience speaks to them, making them feel that somehow they have done something wrong before God. And so this sense of justice, and this sense of God’s Law written in their heart, brings them sometimes to this conclusion. And that is not a bad thing.

Then we move on to Proverbs 12:2, where we read these words – **A good man will obtain favour from the Lord, but he will condemn a man who devises evil.** There again, you see a connection between God convicting a man of sin, and a man being condemned for that sin. Paul said, **For the wages of sin is death.** (Romans 6:23) He also said to the Galatians – **God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.** (Galatians 6:7) In other words, we do not get away with wrongdoing, and certainly not for long. When we come to the end of our lives, we will stand before God. That sets the question of condemnation in the context of God’s justice.

Then we get come to one of the most important questions in the Old Testament. It is found in Isaiah 50:8-9 – **He is near who justifies me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near me. Surely the Lord God will help me; who is he who will condemn me?’** With God on our side, what have we to fear? It is interesting that the same question, **‘Who is he who will condemn me?’** occurs also in Romans 8:34. Here, it occurs in Isaiah within the context of a prophecy concerning the coming of Messiah, the Saviour of the world. **‘The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. (5-6) Therefore I have set my face like a flint. (7)**

‘Condemnation’ in the New Testament

It is interesting that in the New Testament this last phrase in Isaiah is used to describe the determination of Jesus to go to Jerusalem to die on the Cross. (Luke 9:51) Thus, if we have the Saviour on our side, we can afford to ask the question, ‘Who is he who condemns me?’ There is no one to condemn the Christian believer if he belongs to Christ.

Then, finally, the words of our Lord himself, in Matthew 12:42 – **The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgement with this generation and condemn it.** There is a connection here in our Lord’s mind between condemnation and the day of judgement. No; Paul did not invent the doctrine of condemnation to frighten people into becoming Christians; it is a truth evident in the pages of the Bible. Condemnation and judgement are also within the context of God’s law. If we take away the preaching of the law, we cannot begin to commend the grace of God in the gospel. We cannot even begin the gospel. We have this reason for understanding the gospel – it saves us from the condemnation of God on the Day of Judgement.

Now, why do people not feel this these days? Well, because they have never been told. But there is no excuse for not knowing the law. It would be futile to go to a court of law and appeal to the judge like this, ‘I know that I have done wrong now because you say it is wrong; but I never knew it was wrong before.’ Neither would we get far on the day of judgement, if we appear before God saying, ‘But I never heard about the Law. I never heard about the day of judgement.’ We have no excuse, for God’s law is written in our consciences, which either excuses or condemns us.

Lastly, Paul uses the word **condemnation** here in Romans 8:1. It is first found in 3:8. Here are the Jews whom Paul condemned for knowing the gospel, and having received the Son of God into their midst, rejected him and crucified him. They turn on Paul, and say mockingly, ‘Well, all right; but God cannot judge us because it is through our condemnation that the gentiles have been brought into the kingdom.’ Paul replies to this, **And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), Let us do evil that good may come?** The Jews, you see, were arguing for their unbelief: ‘Let us go on unbelieving, allowing the Gentiles to come in through our unbelief.’ To which, Paul exclaims, ‘Not so. It is because of that unbelief that God is just in his condemnation’.

Then on to 5:16, 18 – **And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned** (that is Adam); for, on the one hand, judgement arose from one transgression (from Adam’s sin). It was only one sin that condemned the whole of the human race in the sight of God. It results’, he says, ‘in condemnation (that is the state we are all born into). But, on the other hand, the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification’. Verse 18 – **So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness (that is Jesus dying on the cross) there resulted justification of life to all men.** That means, to all who believe.

Chapter 8:1 tells us that the Christian is no longer under a state of condemnation by God. What a relief! **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.** We find the word again in verse 3 – **His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.** Now, what does he mean by that? How could Jesus condemn sin in the flesh? Well, first of all by his own sin-less-ness. He showed how it was possible for him to live a sinless life that was acceptable to God. It is a condemnation upon us all that Jesus had to die for us. By his sinless death on the cross, he saves us sinners. This also means that he condemned sin in the flesh. He took our sin and he nailed it to his cross, bearing our sin, taking our punishment, condemning our sin, but setting us free from the law of sin and death. ‘Is not that wonderful?’ says the gospel preacher. ‘Yes!’ replies his congregation. This is the beginning and the heart of the gospel.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 25

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Romans 7:6, 8, 12

1. What was it that held us in its grip?
2. Have we died to it yet?
3. How is it described in verse 23?
4. What replaces it?
5. What does sin use to produce evil desire?
6. When is sin dead?
7. Give two words in verse 7 that describe the will of God that must be obeyed?
8. What are the three words that describe God's will in question 7?

Read Galatians 4:21-31

9. Which woman is named as representing the Law? (See verse 25)
10. How is she described in verse 23?
11. Who was the free woman?
12. What was the name of the child of the promise? (See verse 28)
13. What did the child of the flesh do to the child of the promise?
14. What is the opposite of slavery?

Read Romans 10:4

15. What is the end of the Law?
16. What is the relationship between the Law and its purpose?
17. Who is free from the Law?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:22

18. What did Adam bring in?
19. What did Christ bring in?

Read Deuteronomy 25:1

20. Where do those who have a dispute go?
21. Who listens to the case?
22. What happens to those who are condemned? (See verse 2)

Read Job 10:1-2

23. What did Job think of his present life?
24. What was it doing to his soul?
25. What did Job ask God not to do?
26. Did Job blame God?
27. Was he right in his opinion?

Read Proverbs 12:2

28. What does a good man expect from the Lord?
29. Whom does a good man condemn?

Read Galatians 6:7-8

30. What does God find totally unacceptable?
31. What will happen to the one who sows 'to the flesh'?
32. Who will reap everlasting life?

Read Isaiah 50:5-9

33. What did the Messiah not do?
34. What 3 things here refer to the Crucifixion?
35. Why did the Messiah set his face 'like a flint'?
36. What 3 questions does the Messiah ask on our behalf?

Read Matthew 12:42

37. Who was the Queen of the South?
38. What will she condemn?
39. Who is greater than the Solomon she admired?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) Make a list of the five functions of God's Law.
- (2) Explain why the five functions of the Law given in the exposition bring condemnation to sinners.

C. PRACTICAL

Discuss with a fellow-preacher the difficulties of preaching condemnation.

- (1) Write an account of your discussion, giving the date, and the name and status of the other participant in your discussion.
- (2) State your conclusion as to how you would preach the following, giving Bible verses that would be suitable for each subject:
 - your own experience of the conviction of sin
 - repentance
 - the uselessness of the Law and good works in salvation
 - the Day of Judgement
 - heaven and hell

STUDY 26

THE SECURITY OF OUR SALVATION

ROMANS 8:1-2

EXPOSITION

Let us now turn from the condemnation of the Law in chapter 7 to the opening verse of chapter 8, where we find a more positive application of the gospel. One of the joys of a gospel preacher is to see a profound change of attitude in those who respond to their message. This continues as, although believers, they hear more of the gospel. Having come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, much of the old life needs to be undone; but, with the help of the Holy Spirit, it is even possible to see a change in the most deeply ingrained attitude and feeling. It is God who does that! The wonderful thing about being a Christian is God is doing his work in us, perfecting us, making us what we will be. (Philippians 1:6) The fact is, that Christians now stand in a position before God where they feel that what is happening to them is somehow of worth to God. It gives us status. It makes us feel cared for. God does love us, and is doing his work in us. The wonderful thing is that he calls us to co-operate with him in this work.

Now, we read earlier in Romans that there can be no co-operation with God as far as our salvation is concerned. All we need has been provided for us by God. When we were helpless, when there was no hope for us, when we could do nothing for ourselves, Christ died for us. The provision for our being transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son is fully made in the Cross of Christ. Here lies our forgiveness, and here lies our acceptance – in the atoning work of Christ. Here our sins are dealt with, never to be brought up again – **As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us** (Psalm 103:12) – not because we begged him, but because of his mercy in the sending of his Son to die for us on the Cross.

We came willingly when Christ called us to receive him as our Saviour. Then, of course, we expected everything to be perfect and marvellous. We expected to be transformed; and indeed we were, but not as we imagined. We expected to be nearly perfect, only to discover that we were very far from that. Yet that desire to be perfect is indeed a sure evidence of God's Holy Spirit within us whereby the believer is brought to recognise his sinfulness before a holy God. (1 Timothy 1:15)

There is a danger of too much joy in the Christian's experience. Paul recognises this in Romans 8:1 – **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**. We know that God no longer condemns us. Yet verse 13 speaks of putting **to death the deeds of the body** on the basis of what he said in chapter 7. What a great battle the Christian is engaged in! What tension there is in his life! He feels pulled in two directions.

There yet remains some of his old life, allowed by God to remain for his good, so that he may battle with it, and be sharpened by it. Yes; the gospel preacher looks for saved sinners? Yes; saved through faith? Yes; saved by grace? Yet sinners still. Paul makes it clear that Christian experience involves a raging battle – **For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not do that I practise. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.** (Romans 7:19-20)

Sometimes, as Christians, we are appalled at how easily we fall for the sinful wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11). The result is, that sometimes we lose our confidence. We know in our minds that God does not condemn us because we belong to Jesus Christ, but our hearts condemn us because of traitors within. There is a choice to be made – either the flesh or the Spirit. We must control our feelings of guilt and failure, and learn to deal with our sins. That is why it is very necessary in our daily prayers to come before God and confess our sins, and plead with him for forgiveness. We find it difficult to accept that forgiveness. We must not only accept that God no longer condemns us, but be resolved to walk according to the Spirit because we are in Christ Jesus.

1. The believer's security

The first thing we must impress on young Christians is their spiritual security. They must feel secure in the Lord, for there is none anywhere else. When the Jews were committing awful sins, they were relying on their religion, and on their temple, and on the city of Jerusalem, for their security. They said 'All is well. The Lord will look after us; we have been looking after his religion for him. We repeat the sacrifices; we pay our tithes; we say our prayers at the appointed time. So everything will be all right.' But they had fallen into idolatry and coldness of heart toward God. It was Jeremiah who cried, 'Peace, peace! when there is no peace.' (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11) They had a false sense of security before God, and the result was, that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came sweeping in with his armies and devastated the entire land. Jerusalem was broken down, and the people were deported into exile.

Now, a Christian discovers true security. The world looks for security by looking for something to help. There is only one true security, a security found only in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. That is why Isaiah called him the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6) Here, in him, is the source of true peace – an inward peace, not the enforced peace of political agreement and armistice – a deep everlasting peace, **the peace of God which surpasses all understanding** (Philippians 4:7). It is the peace that comes from being right with God – **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Romans 5:1). It is a peace that can never be undermined because it is based on the unchangeableness of God, and the faithfulness of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

True security is to be found in the fact that our salvation does not depend on our effort or lack of effort. **'We are kept'**, says Peter, **'by the power of God through faith for salvation'** (1 Peter 1:5).

2. Set free

The second thing we gospel preachers must emphasise is the need to be set free – **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.** (Romans 8:2) This means that it is God who has set us free, and not ourselves. To be free from ourselves, to be free from our sins, to be free to become what God makes of us, that is freedom indeed! We have already been set free from ourselves in one respect: we do not have to work hard to please God. That is what Paul said. 'You Pharisees, you orthodox Jews, you possess the Law. You try to keep the Law, you try to produce good works. I was

like that once. I was a hard-working Pharisee, one of the strictest of the strictest sects of the Jewish faith. Then I suddenly discovered that I did not need to do it anymore. I ran from the Law, for when the Law came, sin revived, and I died. It killed me', he said. 'I thought I could please God, but it turned out I was a sinner condemned by God's Law. So,' said he, 'the Law made me run away from myself and from my good works and throw myself upon God's mercy.' (Romans 11:31-32) Paul's victory was in Jesus Christ. He discovered that Christ had died for his sins on the Cross. So, in this sense, every Christian is delivered from trying to please God by his works in order to earn his salvation. It is a free gift from God. All we need to do is to take God's provision.

Paul goes on to say, 'Yes; but we need to be set free from ourselves again. We need to change our attitude in this respect – **For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.** (2) Now, you will remember at the beginning of Romans 6 that we were considering one of the three pictures Paul used to illustrate the Christian life. He said, 'There's the slave and there's the master. The master is a cruel tyrant, but he has the power of life and death over you. You groan under the burden of his mastery; but legally, you belong to him, body, soul and mind, and there is nothing you can do about it. But one day the old master decided to accept a bid for you in the slave market. Someone offered to pay the price for you. So you ended up with a new master.' Now the one thing we can do at that point, after the redemption price has been paid, is to turn round to the old master and abuse him to your heart's content. You are no longer under his power, no longer under his control and he has no say in your new life whatever. You are free from him at last; and then you may turn to the new master – and what a new master you have! – and call him Lord.

It is so sad to find some Christians around who are not aware that in taking Jesus as their Saviour, they also take him as their Lord. Paul went one further, and declared himself a slave of Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1) What a proud title this is – a slave (DOULOS, δούλος, in Greek) of Jesus Christ! It is a proud title because we have a great master. What status he confers on us. All that he has belongs to us. We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:17) All that he has is ours; all that he is, is ours. He is our master and we are his slaves; but in his slavery is perfect freedom. That is our freedom; not freedom to please ourselves, but set free to please our Saviour and Lord. Set free also from what was so degrading and burdensome, and which was pulling us down to hell and was destroying and crippling our lives. We have been set free from sin, from Satan, from evil. None of these things has any claim on us.

One attitude ought to worry gospel preachers. This is, that if you are a Christian it really does not matter about sin. This attitude reveals a superficial view of our sin. How is it possible to overcome these portions of the old life that remain within us? The answer is in these words – **For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.**' (2) Christians have the Spirit. The fact is, that there is partnership between the Trinity and the believer. The one who loves us is Father; the one who died for us, who redeems us, and is coming back for us, is the Son; and the one who works in us, and develops out spiritual life, and changes us from one degree of glory into another, is the Holy Spirit. We have a new law within us that overcomes the old Law which caused Paul to cry out, **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** (7:24). The answer is – **The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.** We need to change our attitude, not only with regard to our sin, but also our casual view of it. Do we hate sin with the same hatred that God has towards sin?

That represents the negative side of the question. The positive side comes out in the rest of the verses of chapter 8, leading to that wonderful section at the end where Paul declares, **'And nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'** (39) So often our sin does, and it should not. The way back the fullness

of a relationship with God is to confess our sin and to receive forgiveness and cleansing. (1 John 1:9) This is a sure evidence of spiritual life, whereas many take it as the opposite. 'How could we possibly be Christians, feeling like this?', they exclaim. This is one of the devil's strongest weapons, when he comes along and accuses us with it. He is 'the accuser of the brethren' (Revelation 12:10), taking away the joy of the Christian life, and our certainty and security. Satan shows us our sin, and makes us doubt our salvation. But we hold fast to such a phrase as – **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you** (Romans 8:9) – who not only helps us to recognise our sinfulness, but helps us to deal with it in a Scriptural way.

3. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer

Finally, one more thing needs to be said. There are two traps Christians fall into concerning the Holy Spirit. The first is to never think about him, and never to know anything about him. What a joyful discovery it is to know that the Holy Spirit is God! That he comes and works in our hearts and lives, preparing us for the coming again of the Saviour, tilling the ground, ploughing the hard soil, watering it, and making it ready for the planting of the seeds of life. Many Christians do not know this. They are not aware that they **walk according to the Spirit** (1, 4).

The second error that Christians fall into concerning the Holy Spirit is not only not to know about the Holy Spirit, but not to consider the inward work of the Holy Spirit. We do not recognise that the work the Holy Spirit is doing is vital, who, together with the Son and the Father, brings us into a relationship with almighty God. Our salvation has brought us into the divine family, as adopted children (Romans 8:14-15), adopted through Christ into God's family.

One of the errors that we fall into with regard to the Holy Spirit is to treat him much too lightly. We forget that he is God at work within us. We should show him the same awe we show Jesus Christ our Saviour and our heavenly Father. We possess the Holy Spirit, and we thank God for this, that he does not leave us to fight the battle against sin alone. Our sense of sin, our self-condemnation for sinning, all derive from the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of every Christian. It is **the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus**, which causes us to progress in our spiritual lives until the very end.

If we think that we must go on in the Christian life on our own, we are wrong. God did not leave us to battle alone. We are kept. We are provided for. There is not a single need in us that is not touched by the Holy Spirit of God. Let us thank God for that, for total defeat is unthinkable. And if true, let us praise God that there is indeed hope for us all!

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 26

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Philippians 1:6

1. Who begins the work in a Christian?
2. At what point will this work end?
3. What is 'the day of Jesus Christ'?

Read Psalm 103:11-12

4. To what is God's mercy compared?
5. How far are our sins taken away?

Read 1 Timothy 1:15

6. What was the purpose of Christ's coming?

7. How do we know this is true? (See the beginning of the verse)
8. Where did Paul rank himself among sinners, surprisingly?

Read Ephesians 6:11

9. Who is the enemy of Christians?
10. What are his weapons?
11. What must a Christian use against these weapons?
12. Where would you find a list of them, and their description?

Read Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11

13. What was the common message of the enemies of God in both verse?
14. What does God say about their so-called spiritual solution?

Read Isaiah 9:6

15. Where does true peace come from?
16. The Messiah has four titles. Name them.
17. What is the New Testament name for the Messiah?

Read Philippians 4:7

18. What is a great gift to believers?
19. How great is it?
20. What two things is it used to guard against?

Read 1 Peter 1:5

21. Who are kept? (See verse 3)
22. What keeps them?
23. What does God give?
24. What are Christians required to do?

Read 1 John 1:9

25. What does God do about the sins of believers?
26. What two great characteristics of God are mentioned in this verse?
27. What are Christians required to do about their sins?
28. What, then, will God do?

Read Revelation 12:10

29. What 4 things can a Christian depend upon?
30. Who is 'the accuser'?
31. What has happened to him?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) What are the main things that give a believer a sense of security?
- (2) In what ways can you say that a believer has been 'set free'?

C. PRACTICAL

Use the following verses, each of which gives re-assurance to a believer, and preach a sermon from them.

Psalm 103:12

1 Timothy 1:15
1 John 1:9

Send in your —

- (1) Title.
- (2) Headings.
- (3) Verses of other Scripture quoted,

Report on any results you noted, or comments afterwards, or effects on yourself.

STUDY 27

A NEW SPIRITUAL LAW

ROMANS 8:3-11

EXPOSITION

We have considered what a Christian is not. A Christian is not under the condemnation of God – **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.** Obviously, Paul was thinking back to his own experience, partly described in Romans 7. What he was saying there is that there was a radical change between what he once was and what he is now. A Christian is not the same person who was born into the world – **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** (2 Corinthians 5:17) What Paul is saying here is this: that because we are a new creation, we are no longer subject to the righteous judgement of God, which rests on the old creation. The moment we responded to the gospel and were saved in Christ, God's condemnation of our sin ceased.

1. No condemnation

Notice the word **now** in **...now no condemnation ...** (1) This is a great consolation to every believer, for it means that the times he falls into sin, he need not fear that God will reject him. But how is he to deal with his sin? Christians are often surprised to discover the strength of sin still lurking in them, sin looking for opportunities, times of weakness, to come into the open and cause mischief. And when that happens, it tends to take away their assurance. They feel that they are no longer on God's side, that their salvation no longer holds, and that the Holy Spirit, who is at work in their lives, is no longer there, but has departed. Indeed,

Romans 7:24 sums it up for many Christians – **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** When can we be rid of it? The answer, of course, is when we are perfect, when our old body, part of the old fallen creation, is redeemed – **For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves'** (Roman 8:22-23). How is this possible? Can a Christian come in his spiritual experience to a state of perfection? The Bible teaches us that every conscious moment of every day we are aware that there are traitors within. We are aware that we are still sinners; although sinners saved by grace.

2. Why is the Christian life so painful?

How, then, it is possible to produce the fruit of the Spirit and yet groan within ourselves? Does that sound like a basis for victory? **We ourselves, groan within ourselves.** Why do we groan? We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, which will happen when we come fully into the presence of God? Then will come about **the redemption of our body.** It is the gospel preacher's task to show that before the new birth, the base of operations for the fallen principle is the body, which Paul calls **the flesh.** It is a principle of evil at work within unbelievers, totally defeating them. Remnants of it remain in believers until that day of redemption when we will be perfect in body, soul, mind and spirit.

This is Paul's analysis of the spiritual life of the Christian. In Romans, chapters 7 and 8 are not serial chapters, but parallel. One does not follow the other. What we have here in the two chapters is the normal Christian experience, which is one of unceasing warfare. Now, we know that in a war there are many battles, and the Christian fights one battle after another. We also know that battles do not last forever; they reach a conclusion. And the conclusion for the Christian is always victory.

Yet the moment that we win a victory, we find ourselves back at the beginning of the next battle, which, with the help of the Lord, will lead to a further victory every day of our lives. What is the battle strategy for victory? The answer is in Romans 8. We need not be disturbed when we find ourselves in the middle of a spiritual battle. It is normal, and is to be expected. Indeed, we should take great comfort in the fact that we endure such conflicts. Only a child of God can experience such things and win. It is also important for the gospel preacher to assure his hearers that when they occasionally fall into sin, they will not lose their faith or their assurance. **There is no condemnation.** We are not less saved when we fall into sin than when we first came and received Jesus Christ as Saviour. That sounds extraordinary, doesn't it? But that is the way of assurance. Jesus could have taken all his followers out of the world and transferred them into heaven. Instead, he said to the Father, **I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.** (John 17:15) There it is, you see. Being kept from the evil one is the experience of Romans 7-8.

Sanctification is the aim of every Christian, and is an activity described in verse 13 – **For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

3. Mortification

What does it mean to put to death the deeds of the body? Well, it was the deeds of the body that caused Paul so much distress, so much so that he cried out – **Oh wretched man that I am!** What does it mean to put to death the deeds of the body? Many Bibles translate 'put to death' with the word 'mortify' (from the Latin, meaning 'to put to death'). What should we

put to death? The deeds of the body, those traitors that remain from the old life. God permits them to remain so that we can learn to overcome them, conquer them, triumph over them, in Christ. He was sinless, but he overcame sin. Sin could have no claim on him in any respect. He conquered sin absolutely. And so can we, the more we trust in him. This is a great spiritual work, but we must realise that we are no longer under condemnation. This is where victory begins, not in us conquering sin, but in Jesus Christ who conquered sin on the Cross.

There is now an opposing principle at work that was not there before the new birth. In the previous chapter (Chapter 7), Paul sometimes called it **the law of my mind** (23) or the second 'me' or 'I' (20) or **the law of God according to the inner man**. (22) In the person who is now a child of God, there is a principle at work, which Paul now calls in 8:7, **the law of the Spirit of life**. In 7:23, he writes – **I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members**. In the Christian, there is a new law at work, not the law of death but the law of the Spirit of life. There are two laws: one for life, and the other for death. As far as the believer is concerned, the old life is dead and buried. So what we are dealing with are those parts of the old life that remain. And deal with them we will, with the help of the Spirit of Christ.

What happened when we believed in Christ? Well, the first thing is that we became new creatures in Christ. What of the old life that worried us so much? What of all those evil thoughts and evil deeds, and gross sins? What happened to them? The answer is that they died. They were put to death on the Cross of Christ. We were set free from the law of sin and death. The devil always was a liar from the beginning. He is a liar by insinuating into our minds such thoughts as: 'Look at you, a saint! No; you are a sinner. You are still falling into sin. You do not belong to God; you belong to me.' All the time he is trying to force us back to the life we had before we became Christians. But we have been set free from all that.

We may turn and confront our sins, our temptations, and our weaknesses, and say, 'No! You have nothing to do with me!' Paul declares, 'It is not I, but sin that dwells in me. I have been set free from the law of sin and of death.' This is a great weapon in the Christian's armoury. All Christians are engaged in warfare. They are at war in themselves, and Paul went to a great amount of trouble to explain how this came about. Now that they have been set free from the law of sin and death, they belong to Jesus Christ, so that in the face of temptation they can say, 'No; I will not give in. I belong to Jesus Christ.'

4. The failure of the Law

We now go on to verse 3 – **For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh.**

First of all, Paul is saying, 'Let me tell you what trying to keep the Law did to me. I worked hard in the hope that God would accept me. I thought I was doing well, but when the Law came to me, sin revived and I died. What the Law could not do, God did.' Well, the word 'did' is not in the Greek text, but is implied there. 'God did.' What did this active God do that the Law could not do? Here we are thrown back on his sovereignty. Whom does God save? Certainly not those who try their hardest to keep the Law. Believe me, Paul had a strong desire to get to heaven by keeping the Law. He loved the Law with all his heart, but it could not do anything for him spiritually. So God had to do it.

What did God do that the Law could not do? He sent his own Son to deal with sin. This puts paid to all foolish ideas of making ourselves righteous before God. The moment we introduce Jesus and his death on the cross, we undermine the whole of the 'works' theory. No one can be righteous before God. Why not? Otherwise, Jesus would not have come. **Sending his own son** – those four words destroy any hope men may have of working themselves to heaven.

How did the Son come? Did he come like some great Greek god, and walk among men receiving their worship? Indeed not! Jesus came into a situation where sin was at work. Jesus was not a sinner, but he so involved himself in our human condition that he knew himself what it was like to be at the receiving end of the attacks of sin.

He was tempted by Satan. He knew the weaknesses of the flesh that sin had brought to the human constitution. **He condemned sin in the flesh** – he was qualified to do this. He was born of a virgin, born under the Law, born at the right time. So, coming to us in the form of man, **in the likeness of sinful flesh**, he was in the best position to overcome sin, for he was sinless. Sin had no claim on him because he never committed sin. The devil could never stir Christ into doubting his relationship with God as he does us, for there was nothing in him that could be condemned. Therefore, he offered himself up for our sins upon the Cross. He undid the sinful work of Adam, and came to save his people from their sins. Verse 4 comes to this joyful conclusion, linking believers with the sinlessness of Christ and the inner working of the Holy Spirit – **that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

What was the attitude of Christ to the Law? The answer is found in Matthew 5:17 – **Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.** What does 'fulfil' mean? Not only did he fulfil all the righteous and perfect demands of the Law, but those who believe in him are seen by God as having kept the Law perfectly as well. It also means that, with the help of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Law becomes holy and just and good to us. We are given the strength to observe the Law. We cannot be saved by the Law, but we are saved to keep the Law. And in keeping God's Law, we please the Lord who died to save us.

Verse 5 speaks again of the dual principle that is at work in every Christian – **For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.** We are aware that some teach that there are two kinds of Christians – those who are dominated by the 'carnal', or fleshly, nature, and those who have a spiritual nature. On the evidence of verse 5-6 we must reject this teaching. When we speak of the things of the flesh, we are talking about one who is controlled by the things of the flesh to such an extent that God's condemnation falls upon him. In other words, the unbeliever. Consider verse 6 – **For to be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace.** This, the first part of the verse, could never be applied to a believer. A Christian is alive in Christ, not dead. A Christian can never be called carnal; it is a contradiction in terms. A Christian is of life, of the Spirit. A Christian is no longer under condemnation. His mind delights in the Law of God, and is not set on the flesh. His mind is set on the Spirit who brings life and peace. He is determined to put to death the deeds of the flesh. (13)

5. Walking in the Spirit.

What is walking according to the Spirit, mentioned in this verse? No Christian can be without the Spirit. The Christian is defined as one who is walking in the Spirit. Now, the theme is developed further. What is the carnal mind of verse 7 – **the carnal mind is enmity against**

God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Can it exist in the Christian who is walking according to the Spirit? Indeed not! For such a mind **is enmity against God**. Can a Christian be hostile to God? Of course not! We left all that behind. Once we were hostile to God and the things of God. We hated his Law. We disliked the gospel and gospel preachers. Here is an unbeliever, not subject to the Law of God, and blind to the gospel. That is an unregenerate person.

Verse 8 continues the thought – **So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** In other words, they come under God's condemnation. But Romans 8:1 declares the Christian to be no longer under condemnation because he is in Christ Jesus. You cannot be of the flesh and of the Spirit at the same time. You are either one or the other. The characteristic of the Christian is a lack of hostility towards God, but a great hostility towards sin. The Christian is one who is sensitive towards sin and hostile towards it; who can detect it, hate it and war against it.

In contrast, Paul says of the believer – **But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.** (9) 'However, you (a Roman Christian) are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in you.' When does the Spirit of God dwell in the Christian? Very simply, when he receives Christ into his heart and life; or, put another way, when Jesus Christ saves him. It is then that the Spirit of God comes in. Without the Spirit of God, he would never have known the Law. He would never have known the sinfulness of sin. He would never have known salvation. He would never have known Christ. He could never know the presence of Christ without the presence of the Holy Spirit within. He would never have been able to repent unless the Holy Spirit was within. He would not be born again unless the Holy Spirit was within. When he has the Spirit of God within him, he has Christ within him. **If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.**

Finally, in verses 10-11, Paul speaks of a tremendous benefit that comes to every believer: that is, spiritual life. The Christian not only knows the joy of **no condemnation** (1), but the joy of a new life in Christ. There are two great conditions mentioned here: **if Christ is in you** (10); and, **if the Spirit ... dwells in you** (11). If the Holy Spirit is in us, then Christ is in us, who **dwells in your hearts by faith** (Ephesians 3:17). What happens to the body and soul of the believer? Here are three key phrases:

(a) The body is dead because of sin (10). It is on the way to death, when its elements will go back to the dust. This is **because of sin** (10), for it was sin that killed the body. **For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.** (Genesis 3:19) A Christian hates sin, because it is such an enemy to his body.

(b) But the Spirit is life (10) brings eternal life to every believing soul. The soul comes alive when grace enters the soul. When the body of a believer dies and returns to the dust, the immortal soul will go on living. Death for the believer frees the redeemed soul from the body that it may go into eternal glory. When Abraham died, God was still the God of Abraham, for his soul was still alive (Matthew 22:31-32). What a great verse of hope is Psalm 17:15! **As for me, I will see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness.**

(c) He will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Our bodies will be reunited with the soul and clothed in glory; and lowly bodies will become new (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:42). Because of the resurrection of Christ we are able to say triumphantly – **O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?** (1 Corinthians 15:55; Hosea 13:4) It is Christ's resurrection that gives us the hope that we too will rise

That new life is in operation even now in our bodies by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – **through his Spirit who dwells in you.** (11) Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). These temples may fall into disrepair for a while, but they will be rebuilt. In the day of resurrection, the Spirit will breathe on the dead and dry bones and make them live again (Ezekiel 37:7-10).

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 27

A. QUESTIONS OF THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

1. What other words could be used for being 'in Christ'?
2. What are the 'old things' that have passed away?

Read Romans 8:22-23

3. What caused the creation to groan?
4. With what is the groaning of the creation compared?
5. When will God declare his saved people to be 'adopted'?
6. What will happen to the believer's body in that day?

Read John 17:15

7. What is the great prayer of Jesus Christ for his followers?
8. What does Jesus not pray for?

Read Matthew 5:17

9. What two things did Christ not come to destroy?
10. Where would you expect to find these two things?
11. What did he come to do?

Read Ephesians 3:17

12. How is it possible for Christ to dwell in the human heart?
13. What do you think the word 'heart' means?
14. What will happen when we are 'rooted and grounded in love?' (See verses 18-19)

Read Genesis 3:19

15. What is another word for 'return to the ground'?
16. Which part of man did God make from the ground?
17. What will happen to this part of man at the end of life?

Read Matthew 22:31-32

18. To whom was God speaking in Exodus 3:6?
19. Were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dead when God said this?
20. How do we know that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still alive in heaven?
21. What do Abraham, Isaac and Jacob look forward to? (See Matthew 22:21)

Read Psalm 17:15

22. In his prayer, David says that he is looking forward to seeing something after death. What is it?
23. What reward does David look for?
24. After which event will the answers to 22 and 23 take place?

Read Philippians 3:21

25. What will God do to our 'lowly body'?
26. What will it be like?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42

27. What did Paul regard as a great future event?
28. In what state is the body put into the earth?
29. In what state will the body be raised up?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:55

30. A similar verse in Hosea 13:14 speaks of the destroyer of death and the grave. Who is he?
31. What is the 'sting' of death? (See 1 Corinthians 15:56)
32. Who gives us the victory over Hades (the grave)? (See further in verse 57)

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:9-10

33. There are two questions in these two verses. Write them out.
34. If Christians are the temple of God, who dwells in that temple?
35. Sinners who remain wilfully in certain sins will be excluded from God's kingdom. Name these 10 terrible sins.
36. What three things must be done to such sinners before they can be accepted into God's kingdom? (See verse 11).

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

Several very important words are used in this study.

As they are so important to our understanding of the gospel, write in 25 words (or less) for each of the following words:

- Condemnation
- The failure of the Law
- Sanctification
- Mortification
- Walking in the Spirit

C. PRACTICAL

You have been asked to speak to a group of young people (aged 14-18) about the subject of life after death. They have been asking many questions. Include the following:

- (1) Spiritual resurrection (being born again).**
- (2) Life in heaven after physical death.**
- (3) The resurrection of the body.**

Write out the outline of your talk, giving the verses in the Bible you intend to use, and send it in.

The talk will last no longer than 10-15 minutes.

STUDY 28

GOD'S CHILDREN

ROMANS 8:12-17

EXPOSITION

As we continue to look at some positive aspects of gospel truth in Romans chapter 8, we come to some most inspiring words in this section – **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.** (14-15) In addition, verse 17 brings us to the conclusion of the process of salvation with the words **glorified together**. The doctrine of glorification deserves its own special treatment.

The challenge to live a sanctified life

We have been considering the doctrine of sanctification, when Christians are set apart in the love of God for true service to him. In chapter 8, we deal with the need for Christians to strengthen their faith by self-discipline. Paul writes – ... **if in the Spirit you put to death [mortify] the deeds of the body, you will live.** (13). John Calvin comments in this challenging way – **Although we may still be subject to sin, nevertheless he still promises life, provided we strive to mortify the flesh.** Many lose their confidence at some stage along the way – so this is a message to us all. It is not unknown for Christians who have been in the faith a long time, and are now mature, to realise the extent of their sinfulness before a holy God. Someone put it like this: 'The nearer you come to the sunlight, the more the dirt shows up'. That happens with Christians, when, the nearer they come in their faith to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, the more they realise how holy and pure God is, and the more they begin to see the deeply sinful nature God has saved them from, and what a wonderful thing he has done for them.

When Timothy received his first letter from Paul, he read these words – 'It is a very faithful and acceptable thing to preach to your people that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'. Timothy must have nodded at that point and said 'Oh yes! I've heard him preach that on many occasions.' But he must have been shocked to read what Paul says next about himself – ... **to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.** (1 Timothy 1:15) That was not right; for, after all, Paul had been a Christian for many years. He was the world's greatest Christian thinker. He had written nearly half the New Testament. He was probably the world's greatest missionary to the nations. Yet he calls himself **the chief of sinners!** However, this seems to find an echo in the hearts of many Christians. The more they go on in their faith, the more they understand how God sees them, and are thankful that he accepts them just as they are. He continues to receive them on the same terms as he did at the beginning, when they came to Christ by faith for salvation.

Confidence is restored by considering the sonship of believers. Paul continues – **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.** (14) Martin Luther explains these words thus:

To be led by the Spirit of God means to despise and remove everything that is not of God, even oneself ... It means freely to forsake all earthly things, and to face and welcome the sufferings of the Christian life.

Although we are still sinners, God does not reject us, because the same blood that Christ shed on the Cross to save us is the same blood that goes on cleansing us from all sin. (1 John 1:7) It is true that Christians fail in their courage from time to time. Paul expresses it in Romans 7:24 – **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** Then comes this wonderful Chapter 8, which restores our confidence. The fault lies in us: we do not trust God enough; we do not know him well enough; we do not pray to him enough, bringing our cares and sorrows to him. In other words, our relationship with God needs to be developed further. The Holy Spirit was sent to do this. John Calvin writes, **The Holy Spirit has been given ... to stir us up to call on God with confidence and freedom.**

Romans chapter 8 comes to a triumphant conclusion with a statement about God's love for his children, which never ceases, and from which we can never be separated (38-39). He provides everything that we need, and repeats over and over, 'You are my child, for whom my Son died. I will keep you because I love you.' We are often like children, feeling bewildered and lost in our circumstances. Sometimes we feel overcome. God has the answer to these things. If Christians sometimes feel a lack of assurance, and experience a crisis of confidence, it is very human thing to do; but it ought not to be so.

We see in Romans chapter 8, there is much teaching on the working of the Holy Spirit in the Christian. It is a supernatural work. What sets a Christian apart is the fact that he has the inward supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in his heart and life. The believer enters a spiritual dimension where God is at work in him. The Holy Spirit work in us, enlarging our faith, and helping us grow towards maturity.

Now, what in particular does the Spirit do for us? Well, after looking at various aspects of the Spirit's work, we come now to one that shows us how he helps us to regain our confidence. We find it in verse 16 – **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.** The very feelings of the believer are engaged in such a way that he cries out, **Abba, Father** (15) – a sure recognition of his adoption by the Father. John Calvin makes this point: **This is the cry of a heart which is full of childlike trust and knows not fear.** Calvin directs us to the words of the Apostle in Galatians 4:6-7 – **And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father! Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

Head knowledge, and heart experience

Many Christians have great head-knowledge. They read books of theology; they have listened to many sermons; they know the Bible stories, and read their Bibles every day. Then some disaster occurs in their lives, and their spiritual life begins to decline. Their faith is not adequate for the realities of life. Yet they have great knowledge. There is something missing, somewhere. What is it? Well, they need to 'feel' their faith, and put their faith into practice. They need to pass the test of their faith. What Christians know is not necessarily what they do. What they know needs to be put to the test. They may understand that they are the children of God, having believed in Christ, yet there are times of questioning when they find it difficult to believe certain things, or they fail Christ, and wonder if he could possibly forgive them. That is how some Christians feel. So there is a difference between what they know and how they feel. There is a warning here: it is wrong for Christians to base

their assurance on their feelings, because feelings change, sometimes by the minute, or sometimes by the day.

Our feelings toward God change. Take worship as an example. Some days we worship with coldness of heart, when it has become a burden and a duty. We warm up spiritually as time passes. That is normal. That is human. That is why we come together for worship. We warm up spiritually together. Coming together deepens worship and changes our feelings. But we should not base our faith on our feelings. That is fatal.

How can we really know that we are children of God? This is as absurd a question to ask, as, when waking up in the morning, saying, 'Oh, I wonder if I am a human being'. We know it as a fact. It is beyond question. It is a self-evident truth. In the same way, the Holy Spirit who is at work in us makes the truth self-evident that **as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God ... You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.** (14-16)

What then should be our response to God, who impresses upon us through the Holy Spirit, 'You are my children. You really are my children.' He goes on assuring us. Oh! We are so like children. We need to grow in our faith; we need to go on to maturity. There is always more to discover, always more to experience. And there is always more to learn about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acceptance by God

Finally, what is it that gives us this assurance? The Holy Spirit is at work within us assuring us that we are the children of God. What is our response to that? The fact that we are accepted by God through Jesus Christ is the key to answering that question. It works in this way, too: we accept God; we accept Christ; we accept the Holy Spirit; we accept what God has done for us; we accept what God is doing for us; we accept what God will do for us, both in this life and in the glory. We accept that God is God, and that what God says is true. If God says that we are his children, we reply, 'Thank you Father. Then we are your children.' This takes the place of doubt when we say, 'But that can't possibly be true, not the way that I am and the way that I feel.' Oh to be rid of a wavering faith and lingering doubts! How can we obtain assurance? By responding with a simple acceptance. We are accepted by God if we belong to Jesus Christ. That is a firm promise from God.

Here are some final thoughts on acceptance which we must get across to our congregations if we are to remain faithful gospel preachers. We all know what it is like not to be accepted? Try and remember times in the past when you were rejected.

Do you remember the job you applied for? You went along with all the other applicants and sat nervously as you were called in one by one. You thought you were the best qualified person there, and were sure that you would get the job. The interview went very well and you felt that the job was yours. Then a few minutes later, someone came out from the room and called somebody else in. Do you remember the feeling you had? It was the feeling of rejection.

Do you remember when you were a child, and were bursting to tell Father something. You tore along to him, but he was busy doing something, and he said, 'Not now, I'm busy. Come back later.' Do you remember how you felt? You were full of news, but you were not allowed to share it. He would not listen. You felt rejected.

Jesus called us to belong to his Church. He did not reject us, but received us to himself. When he saved us, he accepted us just as we were. The Church is where Christians are accepted by one another; not rejected, which is not a good feeling.

Now, here are one or two final things about acceptance. How heart-breaking it is to hear of a husband leaving his wife and going off with another woman, or the wife with another man. How terribly rejected the one left behind must feel! What a devastating feeling that must be, to feel abandoned and totally rejected. The Christian faith is the opposite of that. God's relationship with us is forever. **For he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?** (Hebrews 13:6; Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5; Psalm 118:6) God accepts us as we are, and never abandons his children. **You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.** (15)

**Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

(Charlotte Elliott, 1789 – 1871)

Here is the basis of our assurance – that God has received us just as we are. Our confidence is restored with these words -**accepted in the beloved** (Ephesians 1:6) – indeed, the very opposite of rejection. God **predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace** (Ephesians 1:5-6). That phrase **accepted in the beloved** is used only once in the New Testament; so it is special. Whenever you are tempted to abandon your faith for shame, and lose your joy in the Lord, and no longer feel that you a child of God, turn to this verse, look the devil straight in the eye, and say, 'You liar! God says to me, **'ACCEPTED.'**

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 28

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read 1 Timothy 1:15

1. What did Paul regard as a **faithful saying**?
2. What sort of people does Christ save?
3. Why do you think Paul called himself the **chief** of sinners?

Read 1 John 1:7

4. What does John mean by **walk in darkness**? (See also verse 6)
5. What cleanses from sin?
6. What do we say to those who say that they have no sin?

Read Galatians 4:6-7

7. How do we become sons of God? (See verse 5)
8. Where does the Holy Spirit enter?

Read Romans 8:12-17

9. What does **Abba** mean?
10. What wonderful things happen to God's children?

Read Hebrews 13:5-6

11. What will God never do?
12. What does God do especially for his children?
13. Consequently, what does God cast out?

Read Deuteronomy 31:6

14. Who spoke these words?
15. What other promise does God make here?
16. What was Israel about to do? (See verse 7)

Read Joshua 1:5

17. To whom did God make this promise?
18. What had he been to Moses? (See verse 1)
19. What two things came to him from trusting God's promises? (See the beginning of verse 6)

Psalm 118:6

20. Do we know who wrote this Psalm?
21. How many times does **LORD** occur in the Psalm?
22. What is the significance of its being mentioned so often?
23. What conclusion is drawn in this Psalm about the Lord? (See verses 8-9)
What great experience does the Psalmist declare in verse 6?

B & C

QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL

Here is the hymn by Miss. Elliott in full, the first verse of which was quoted in the exposition.

1
Just as I am without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come,

2
Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.

3
Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come.

4
Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yes, all I need, in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.

5
Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.

6
Just as I am – thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down –
Now to be thine, yes, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.

7
Just as I am, if that free love
The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,
Here for a season, then above,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Charlotte Elliott (1789 – 1871)

Read each verse carefully, and:

- (1) Make a summary of the practical doctrine Miss. Elliott is teaching in her hymn.
- (2) Make a list of things that you find in common between this hymn and the exposition of the sermon that you read earlier.
- (3) From the points that you have made in (2), which ones suit the needs of your own congregation? Explain why?

STUDY 29

THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

ROMANS 8: 17-18

EXPOSITION

There are some very important words at the end of Romans 8:17, beginning with a conditional 'if' - **heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.** Some Christians lack confidence and assurance. This ought not to be. As a human condition, it is understandable, but it is wrong, for God has made provision for believers to live confidently. There are certain statements made in this chapter that give Christians cheer. Not only may they know that they are Christians, but they are encouraged to act like Christians, as children of God, as the redeemed of Jesus Christ, as those whose sins have been forgiven, and over whose head once hung God's condemnation, but no more - **There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.** (1)

One basis for Christian assurance

We have considered in this chapter some ways in which God assures us that we are really his children. Now we come to a new basis altogether, yet still linked with the work of the Holy Spirit. God works in a supernatural way in the hearts and lives and minds of his children. Those who belong to Christ are a supernatural people, living into a supernatural dimension. They are no longer citizens of this world, but are the children of God. They are an outpost of heaven, whose **citizenship is in heaven** (Philippians 3:20). The Spirit of God and of glory resides in them. They are no longer of the world for they are the people of God. They have come alive in Christ. And every Christian is assured when **the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.** (16) He receives a spirit of adoption and cries out to God - **Abba, Father.**

The fact that God accepts him, just as he is, is a wonderful ground for assurance; and, he, on his part, needs to accept that. Here is the wonder of the gospel. The gospel needs none of his good works; only his faith. It is a gospel of love, a gospel of trust, a gospel of being accepting in Christ. To know that is to gain in Christian assurance.

A strange basis for assurance

We come now to another ground for assurance, and the hardest and most difficult of all. We do not speak of it often, for it involves the gospel of suffering. Gospel preachers often find this aspect of the gospel difficult to come to terms with, and impossible to preach. But when tackled biblically, it becomes very rewarding, and produces much fruit.

When we preach to our congregation, we may not be aware that some are carrying an almost unendurable burden, their lives being full of secret griefs, sorrows and cares. We like to think that as preachers we can cope with our own problems, yet really we do not. We find our own sufferings difficult to handle, and our problems almost too impossible to bear. This is a hard fact of the Christian life. Yet, if we do not overcome, then we should renounce our Christianity. For if there is no hope in our sufferings, there is no hope anywhere. If the Bible

has nothing to say to help us in our sufferings, then we should put aside every Bible as useless.

Now, having faced these hard truths, let us think what precious things we might declare to our hearers. We can start by saying this: 'We have a God who knows all about us.' Indeed, he not only knows about us by observation but knows our condition from experience. God's only begotten Son suffered and died in agony on a Roman cross, and was **in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin**. We have a high priest who sympathises with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15) He both knows and cares. We have in heaven, seated on the right hand of the Father, One who knows what it is like because he became a man and lived among us. He himself suffered, carried his burdens, and died. He knows what it is to suffer.

If children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We are delighted to hear this, that God has called us to be his children. We like to preach this side of things, that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Yes; it is a wonderful truth. But Paul does not leave it there. He confirms that believers are the children of God, but he also declares that the ground of assurance can be found in their suffering - **if indeed we suffer with him**.

Our evangelism, which partly involves the gospel of suffering, begins with the New Covenant. When Jesus signed his last will and testament (covenant), it was in two parts. The first part spoke of his death on the cross, that sinners might have a way of approaching God. This was the most difficult part. The second part of the will assures us that despite the sufferings of this life, we will be with Christ forever. The first part assures us that Christ will **present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy** (Jude verse 24); the second part deals with the difficulty of ever attaining this in view of the sufferings we experience in this life. This is not an easy subject to preach, but here it is in verse 17 - **if indeed we suffer with him**. There is a consequence to following Jesus Christ. It is not all, as the world might say, 'sweetness and light'. The Christian life involves suffering. We might suppose that Jesus could have come into the world and by magic saved everyone at a stroke, changed sinners into saints, and made the world perfect. But he chose instead his father's will, and came into the world to be like us, taking human flesh and experiencing from the moment of his birth the pain and suffering that is the common heritage of every human being in cross. Christ was willing to endure all that, that he might make us the heirs of God. That was the path he chose; that was the purpose of his coming. The reason why Christians remain in the world is that they too should suffer as Jesus suffered.

Some evangelists say, 'Become Christians because you can see how wonderful it is going to be. Look what it is like to be forgiven your sins. Look what it is like to have joy in your heart. Look what it is like when God provides for all your needs, and gives you many blessings.' They make a long list of inducements to commend the gospel to others; but you can be sure they will not include among them suffering for Christ. Yet he helps us to cope with our sufferings. We bear them because Jesus did. The risen Christ is alive today, and he helps us. A great proof that God's Son fulfilled his mission successfully is in the way he helps us in our suffering. In the sufferings of Christians, the world sees a display of the supernatural keeping power of God.

The purpose of suffering

Consider Philippians 3:10, where Paul exclaims - **that I may know him** [Christ]. That is surely the desire of every Christian. But Paul continues - **that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings**. This last phrase is difficult - **the fellowship of his sufferings**. The word **fellowship** means (in Greek) a sharing together. It was the custom in the east to share from a common bowl. The guests around the table reached into the bowl and took out whatever they wished. The food was

shared. In the same way, Jesus came to share our sufferings that we might have a share in his. This gives dignity to the burden of the sufferings and infirmities of God's children. Their suffering now has meaning. The purpose is for them to discover.

We find a challenge in the words of Luke 6:26 - **Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.** The true prophets suffered, and many were put to death for declaring the word of the Lord; but the false prophets were left alone, and everyone spoke well of them. A true Christian, living the life of a Christian, is bound to come into conflict with the world. The Lord Jesus said - **Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.** (Matthew 10:34-35) How many Christian children discover that their parents are hostile to them because of the faith they profess? Jesus said - **I did not come to bring peace but a sword.** Being Christians, we find ourselves cut us off in many respects from the demands and expectations of the world. If we live as Christians, we must accept the fact that we are going to suffer. Jesus said - **Woe to you when all men speak well of you.** The ultimate word of challenge in this life is, 'Do you suffer as a Christian? Are you mocked? Are you rejected? Do you suffer because you are a Christian?'

Let us also consider John 16:33 - **These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.** How many men and women are overcome by their sufferings, becoming hard and bitter, and unable to cope? Jesus said - **In the world you will have tribulation.** He himself endured it. **Tribulation** means (in Greek) 'pressure', 'crushing', 'squeezing'. To use a nutcracker, you squeeze the arms until the nut cracks open. The world exerts great pressure on Christians, sometimes slowly over a period of time. Jesus said, 'Because of your faith, because of your witness, because of the way that you live, and the evil things you avoid, you will come under great pressure. But **be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**' And that is the answer. We survive because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Through tribulation, God is making something of us.

When Christ is with us in our sufferings, we become, as Paul writes in Ephesians 5:2, like Christ, **a sweet-smelling aroma.** We become a fragrance in the world. Fragrances are extracted by crushing the fruit or the flower. It was so with Christ. We read in Isaiah 53:5 - **he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.** He was utterly crushed. No wonder he cried out on the cross, **My God! My God! Why have you forsaken Me?** (Matthew 27:46) Crushed indeed! But oh, the fragrance of that offering and sacrifice to God! In Christ, we are an aroma in the world. We are the saved, Christians believers, Christ's followers. We are beneficiaries of his will that he effected in the world by his death. He too suffered, and he comes and enters into our suffering and tribulations.

How could Christ endure all the suffering during the thirty-three years of his life on earth? Because he was never alone from his Father. Jesus, in his turn, will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Because Jesus suffered, he understands our sufferings; and, in our turn, we will be able to comfort those who are suffering. That is part of the purpose of suffering.

Trials

Trials is another word used to describe Christian suffering. **In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.** (1 Peter 1:6) How encouraging it is for any preacher to comfort distressed members of his congregation with the words - **that the genuineness of your faith, being much more**

precious than gold which perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory (7-8). Love and joy is bound to be there somewhere in our sufferings. God will surely keep us, and never allow us to go beyond what we can bear. (1 Corinthians 10:13) He allows us trials - temptation from within or testing from without. They are hard to bear, but he will keep us.

Next, consider anxiety. **Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you.** (1 Peter 5:6) We like to hug our sufferings to ourselves. We do not want to be investigated, just left alone. Well now, God says to us, 'reach out to me in all your sufferings. Cast all your care upon me because I care for you.'

Finally, we arrive at the **suffering** itself - **For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings that we also suffer.** (2 Corinthians 1:5) In verse 3, Paul speaks of God as **the father of mercies and the God of all comfort.** In our sufferings, we share in the sufferings of Christ in some strange, unimaginable way. Peter encourages us with these words - **but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings.** (1 Peter 4:13) Now, this gives dignity to those who sufferer. When we suffer as Christians, we know that God will reveal his love to us, and will not allow us to bear more than we are able. Our sufferings, then, release the fragrance of Christ into the world.

The return of Christian confidence in suffering

The conflict described by Paul in chapter 7 due to indwelling sin could easily undermine Christian confidence. So in order to bring Christians to the point of sanctification, conflict and victory must be brought together. Without progress, there can be no confidence. Now, Romans chapter 8 is an ideal solution to the question: 'How can I know; how can I be sure?' In this list of factors, which cause the Christian to gain in confidence, there comes this unusual one. Yet it is the most realistic of all; something that touches our hearts to the very depths of our lives, and it is found this word that occurs in verse 17 - **suffer.** We like the first part of the verse - **If we are children then we are heirs also of God and fellow heirs with Christ.** We could wish that the ink in Paul's pen had dried up, for he goes on to add what is the most difficult part of the verse - ... **if indeed we suffer with him, in order that we may be glorified with him.**

First of all, suffering is linked to our adoption as the children of God, and our inheritance as children. In its turn, suffering is something we inherit. If Christ suffered, then we too will suffer. Paul declared - **I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ** (Colossians 1:24) - an astonishing and very daring statement. If we associate with the crucified Christ, then we too are crucified with him; and that involves suffering. If Christ suffered on the cross, so too will we. This was Paul's boast - **God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** (Galatians 6:14)

There can be no crucifixion from the world without pain. It is a complete break with the world. We were once one with the world, but now we have been taken out of it. That involves suffering. Indeed, when James and John wanted to take the right and left-hand of Christ's throne when he came into his kingdom, he asked them - 'Can you drink of the cup that I am going to drink? Can you be baptised with the baptism that I will be baptised with - a baptism

of blood, and a baptism of suffering?' 'Can you?' was a fair question. When they replied, 'Yes', Jesus accepted their answer. In later years, James was taken to be tortured and have his head cut off by Herod, and John experienced loneliness and exile as an old man in the island of Patmos. To be associated with Christ, and partake in his glory, means sharing in his sufferings. The apostle Paul wrote - **that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings** (Philippians 3:10). Glory and suffering go together, and that thought is repeated here in Romans 8. If we are the children of God, then we will inherit his sufferings.

But that is not the end of the matter, because the verse, having begun high, and descending low, rises high again: sonship - suffering - glorification. We have no grounds for glory in ourselves, but only in Christ. Our inheritance with Christ involves suffering with him, and this in its turn brings glory. There is something in our sufferings that leads to glory. A Christian who suffers will know something of the glory of God in Christ.

Glorification

The glory is not something far distant in the future for us, but is now. We receive tokens of the heavenly life now, and these tokens are in themselves glorious. They are part of the Christian life, part of the Christian heritage, and are available to Christians in their suffering.

We endure heartbreak and care and anxiety; all part of our inheritance as humans. When the Lord saved us, he did not promise a life without disaster. What he does is to help us by transferring us into a different dimension altogether - the dimension of faith. It is also a dimension of eternal life, a dimension of living, a dimension of life with the risen Christ to enable us to cope with our sufferings, whether spiritual, emotional, physical, or any other way. He helps an ordinary person become extraordinary in Christ.

Now, suffering is a basis for confidence, a door to glory. God not only saves us, but in his will conforms us to the image of Christ. That image involves suffering. Jesus Christ was tempted like us. His experience was identical to our own. He was tried like us. He suffered like us - **Yet without sin**, adds the writer to the Hebrews. His was a perfect response to his sufferings. **He learned obedience by the things that he suffered** (Hebrews 5:8). When he considered what was about to happen to him on the cross, he prayed, **O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.** (Matthew 26:39) But he undid the faithless work of Adam in the beginning, when the first man said. 'I will take of the fruit' and disobeyed God. Christ put God's will first. **Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.** Here, Christ speaks on behalf of the new race of believers, as the last Adam. Adam brought misery and uncountable suffering to the whole human race, but Christ reversed it. He did not avoid the suffering. Although God, he came into the human situation; and as a man he endured the Cross and died. He suffered as we all suffer, but added meaning to suffering by dying on the cross for the sins of fallen humanity. That is what he did. It is wonderful, isn't it!

The glory of Christ

When Mary, the mother of our Lord indicated that he should turn the water into wine at a wedding, he replied - **My hour has not yet come.** (John 2:4) As we gradually go through John's Gospel, we get a sense of the urgency of this 'hour'. **And now, O father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was.** (John 17:5) His suffering on the cross was his hour of glory. The Lord does indeed allow his children to suffer. Trials are sent to produce golden Christians (1 Peter 1:6-7). Anxieties cause us to cast our cares upon the One who cares for us. The sufferings of one Christian are the means of bringing blessing to another - **For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.** (2 Corinthians 1:5).

The Christian has a peculiar way of looking at suffering. He begins by accepting it, not by running away from it. He must come to terms with the fact that although he is born into a new life, he is not born out of human experience. **I do not pray, said Jesus, that you should take them out of the world.** (John 17:15) He did not pray that Christians should be taken out of their suffering and pain and anxiety and care. He prayed that they should be kept from devilish darts that would make them react ungraciously to their sufferings, and thereby lose their assurance and confidence in their faith. And there are many Christians who are like that.

Christ came, as Paul writes towards the close of this chapter, to make us more than conquerors in our sufferings (37). The painful things that we experience lead on to glory. Let us face these things, and take heart in the fact that nothings can separate us from the love of Christ - whether tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword (35).

All these things bring pain to Christians. But in Christ we overwhelmingly conquer. We are able to find God's will in them and regain our confidence. So here is something that helps us tentatively towards an answer to the question: 'Why do I suffer?' For the unbeliever, there is no answer. But, for the Christian, the answer is in the Cross. We do not reject suffering; we find a positive approach in the gospel of suffering. Our sufferings do have a purpose. They are God's will, and are the way to glory. We are enabled to affirm - **Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus? Height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.** (35) When we are in pain, we remember these words. Pain is not a punishment from God; it is a door to glory, where nothing can separate us from his love.

We are able to say to our congregation, 'Christ comes with the pain and says to you, I know, for I have been there. I have experienced it. Then he takes us by his loving hand, and says, Now, come with me. I know the way, for I have been there. Step through with me. Therefore, let us go through this door on the way to glory. And let us trust him.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 29

1. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED.

Read Philippians 3:20

1. Why is heaven so important to its citizens?
2. What will happen to their bodies eventually? (See verse 21)

Read Hebrews 4:15

3. How can Christ sympathise with our weaknesses?
4. What is unique about Christ as high priest?

Read Jude verse 24

5. What two things does Christ do for all believers?
6. How does he feel about this?

Read Philippians 3:10

7. Why did Paul want to know Christ so much?
8. What other word is used in the transcript for 'fellowship'?

Read Luke 6:26

9. What danger do witnessing Christians face?
10. Who received the approval of Jews of previous generations?

Read Matthew 10:34-35

11. What effect has Christ had on the world?
12. What often happens between believing and unbelieving relatives?
13. Where can a Christian's enemies often be found?

Read John 16:33

14. What is found in Jesus Christ?
15. What does a Christian find in the world?
16. What illustration does the transcript use for this?
17. What brings cheer to the afflicted Christian?

Read Ephesians 5:2

18. Walking in love release what?
19. In what two ways did Christ give himself up?

Read Isaiah 53:5

20. Who caused Christ to be 'smitten'?
21. Which word is used to describe the Cross? A _____.
22. What brings about our healing?

Read Matthew 27:46

23. What is awful about the cry of Christ?
24. What do you think is the meaning of the word 'forsaken'?

Read Hebrews 13:5

25. What did Christ promise?
26. Where can this verse be found in the Old Testament?

Read 1 Peter 1:6-8

27. What is grieving to Christians?
28. To what is genuine faith compared?
29. Why is it tested?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

30. What promise does God make to Christians who are being tested?
31. What further promise does he make?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:5

32. What comes to Christians in abundance?
33. Who consoles them?
34. How is that of benefit to others? (See Exposition)

Read 1 Peter 4:13

35. How should we react to suffering for Christ?
36. When will they end?

Read Colossians 1:24

37. The Exposition calls this verse 'a daring statement'. Why?

Read Galatians 6:14

- 38. In what did Paul boast?
- 39. From what is the believer separated?

Read Hebrews 5:8

- 40. What did Christ learn in his suffering?
- 41. What were two results of learning this lesson? (See verse 9)

Read Matthew 26:39

- 42. What was 'this cup'?
- 43. Which word in this verse has changed world history?

Read John 2:4

- 44. Did Christ act because of his mother's request?
- 45. What 'hour' did he refer to?

Read John 17:5, 15

- 46. What did Christ long for?
- 47. What do Christians need to be protected from?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

In Romans 8:17-18, Paul mentions 'suffer' and 'sufferings' with reference to Christians.

- (1) What kind of suffering is he referring to here?
- (2) Why does a Christian have to suffer?
- (3) What is the 'glory' of verse 18? How will it be revealed in Christians?

C. PRACTICAL.

You will need some illustrations when you come to preach on Romans 8:17-18.

- (1) Write out two instances of the suffering of a Christian in your own life.
- (2) Write out two instances of Christian suffering in the lives of members of your own congregation.

STUDY 30

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

ROMANS 8:19-25

EXPOSITION

Let us remind ourselves briefly of the force of the argument of Roman chapter 8. The Apostle has been speaking of the confidence of Christians. After the extensive diagnosis of the human condition in chapter 7, Paul then deals with the consequent loss of confidence by many Christians. So he declares in 8:1 that Christians are free from condemnation, and must not feel condemned – **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**. So, what is the basis of the believer's confidence before God, even when he thinks badly of himself? What is the secret of Christian confidence? Well, the apostle goes on to give a whole series of wonderful promises of which a Christian may take hold because they are from God. He can delight in them, and find stability in them, for they are the basis of his approach before God. We looked at some of them in the early part of the chapter, particularly those concerning the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in every believer. (This theme will be taken up again from verse 26, when the apostle speaks of the Spirit's help in prayer.)

Verses 12-17 are a brief summary – almost a complete exposition – of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, giving confidence to the Christian. Then, finally, in verse 17-18, we saw how Christians react when things go wrong in their lives. No doubt the apostle Paul had many problems to cope with; and indeed, perhaps more than any of us, he knew what it was to suffer. Suffering leads to glory in Jesus Christ (8:17). So here is a further motivation for triumphing over the sufferings of this present age.

The sufferings of the present time

Now, we come to verse 19 – **the earnest expectation of the creation**. Christians are so often in a minority that, when they are seen to suffer, they are ridiculed and ignored. The result is that they tend to feel inferior. The Lord Jesus experienced this also – **despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**. (Isaiah 53:3) Paul says – **For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God**. (20) This **earnest expectation** is more graphically described in verse 22 – **the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now**. Paul looks at the world and the affairs of men and physical nature and sees evidence of great pain and suffering.

This came about because of sin, for man fell into sin at the beginning. The result is a world groaning with pain. Now, this will not go on forever. What improves the self-image of Christians is the fact that the world is waiting on them. As believers, as children of God in Christ, they are very much at the centre of God's purpose for this world. It is good to think of the world without pain, when there will be no more sorrow, no more crying, **when the former things have passed away** (Revelation 21:4).

All this is vitally connected with God's dealings with his children. There is a definite link between the gathering up by God of men and women throughout the world, and a world that is suffering and groaning in pain. Christians are not exempt from these things. But there will come a time when the number of God's children will be complete, and they will be fully revealed. When they meet the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming, all will be changed.

So you see, believers are very important. At present, they find themselves rejected. What they consider precious, and desire to bring to others, is not acceptable. People ridicule them, and count them as nothing. But the fact is, things are not what they seem. Indeed, Jesus declared – **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.** (Matthew 5:5) You see, God will reverse the order of things at the end. Do not judge the future by the present. Yes; God's people may be rejected, repressed, imprisoned, and persecuted; yet the history of the world depends on them, and their works, and God's dealings with them.

Romans 8:19 brings us great encouragement. **Earnest expectation** can be best translated as 'a strong longing'. It is a deep longing looking for satisfaction. It is like a horse waiting for the opening of a race. **Earnest expectation** is a longing to go on to something better; to be rid of restrictions; to feel free to do what God has purposed for the world.

The phrase **the revealing of the sons of God** contains the Greek word APOKALUPSIS, αποκάλυψις (pronounced, APO-KALL-UP-SISS) which has come into the English language as 'Apocalypse'. Normally, it is thought of as meaning disaster and catastrophe; but not in the Bible. The last book in the Bible is called the 'Revelation' (Apocalypse). In Revelation chapters 19-20, we see the apocalyptic nature of the book when evil and all that is associated with it comes to its rightful end. In chapter 20-22 we see the perfecting of the Church and the perfecting of the world. In the Revelation, John makes it abundantly plain that the revelation is about Jesus Christ, and the revelation of the children of God. Believers are given authority to call themselves the children of God (John 1:12). And in such a position, they are set by God in the centre of events.

(1) Believers will be considered blameless

There will come a revelation, an unveiling, in which the sons of God will play an important part. At that point, the ills of this world will come to an end. Let us consider first of all 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 – ... **eagerly waiting for the revelation [apocalypse] of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Here is great encouragement for any Christian, for there is a point to history to which all is moving – the revelation of Jesus Christ. Christ is coming again! The world failed to rid itself of Jesus Christ. It executed him on a cross, and then put his tortured and broken corpse into a tomb to rot away. As far as the world is concerned, he was finished. The Bible tells another story.

Throughout twenty centuries, millions have discovered that this was not the end of Jesus Christ – that he is alive, risen, and coming again. That is the hope of every Christian; and it is not a vain hope. It is often stated in the Bible that Christ is coming again. But, what is he coming for? He is coming, surely, for his own people. They eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus. They look forward to it. Gospel preachers should often challenge their congregations with this question: 'Do you eagerly await the coming of Jesus Christ?' The Apocalypse is a double-edged sword. For some it means glory, for others, judgement. The preacher must ask, 'Is Jesus Christ coming again for you because you belong to him? Or is Jesus Christ coming again to judge you, because you have not believed in him?'

At the **revelation**, Christians will not be fearful of coming before God, for God will see us as **blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We tremble at our frailties, at our sins, at

our weaknesses, at our lack of commitment, and at our lack of fruit. We are all fearful of these things; but Paul assures us that when we appear before God we will be blameless. We take heart from that. Many Christians are so self-condemnatory, and their self-image is poor. We will appear before God **blameless**. The devil asks, 'What sort of Christian are you? Look at you! You don't behave like a Christian at all. You cannot possibly be a Christian; you belong to me.' Just take up your Bible, and with your pen, draw a ring round the word **blameless**. That is how we will appear before God in the Lord Jesus.

(2) Believers will be revealed with Jesus Christ

The **revelation** of the sons of God is very much connected with the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul states in Colossians 3:4 – **When Christ who is our life appears [at the revelation], then you also will appear with him in glory.** In the previous verse (verse 2), we find two characteristics of a Christian. A Christian lives his life on earth, but thinks of heaven – **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.** So many believers are so caught up with the problems of life, with its suffering and its pressures and stresses that they forget to set their minds on heavenly things. The true Christian is able to set these things aside for a time and concentrate on the things that are above. Verse 3 speaks of the fact that a Christian is dead – dead to the old life, dead to condemnation, dead to guilt. He is dead to them, for they have no claim on him. His **life is hidden with Christ in God.** He is sheltered by him. Then when Christ who is their life is revealed, believers will be revealed with him. No Christian will be ashamed to meet him at the end.

The gospel preacher would do well to challenge his hearers with this question – 'Is Christ your life?' When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then we also will be revealed with him in glory. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels and the redeemed rejoiced. That was glory. When the Father looked upon his Son and declared his sacrifice perfect and acceptable, by which an uncountable number of sinners are redeemed, that was glory. When the Father looked at his Son and said, 'Your work is finished; you may be seated', that was glory. When the Son mentions our name to the Father and intercedes for us, that is glory too. But the greatest glory for any Christian is simply to look on the face of the Saviour and reflect back that glory.

Now, it is true that we do not notice what God is doing in us from day to day. We have a very poor opinion of our Christian lives. But, we overlook the changes that are taking place in us from day to day. God notices it because he is doing it. We are being changed 'from glory into glory'; and, at this present moment, as we go on in our Christian lives, we reflect more and more something of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. But at the end, it will be a full revelation of the glory of God. It is so indescribable that the Bible writers found it difficult to speak of it. So great was the glory when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, that he put a veil over his face because people could not look at him. His face reflected the glory of God. (Exodus 34:29-35) Now, believers reflect the glory of Jesus in themselves. They **also will appear with him in glory.**

(3) The Christian's firm hope

What will be our first thought when we stand before Christ and realise that we have persevered to the end? We will surely affirm, 'It is entirely by the grace of God!' Peter wrote – **Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** (1 Peter 1:13) That is how the Christian survives – through the grace given him. There will be a great sense of relief, a sense of fulfilment, the moment we stand before Christ and realise that, just as he promised, we have been brought to life and glory by his grace. When Christ comes again

to receive us to himself, we are bound to exclaim, 'Such grace! Such mercy! Such power that brings us to this place!'

(4) The final appearance of the children of God

John wrote – **See what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.** (1 John 3:1-2) The greatest hope and certainty of the Christian is that he will not only be redeemed, but that he will be like the Redeemer, who is forming his people into the family image. That is most extraordinary, and something we find difficult to take in,; for at best we are sinners saved by grace. Yet John says here, 'When Christ appears, we will be like him', in that great day of revelation.' How impossible that sounds! How inconceivable! Yet it is what God is doing.

Now, returning to Romans 8, we ask, 'What is God doing about this groaning and labouring and sinful world?' The answer must surely be, 'Much!' If God is changing his children into something glorious, then what will he do for his creation? In a way, Christians are the mark of God, which he stamps on the world. They are part of the hope of the world. They witness to the world that pain and sorrow will come to an end at the revelation of the children of God.

The future of the Universe

What is God's purpose for the universe? The answer to this profound question is found in verses 20-22 – **For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.**

(1) A Christian perspective

Somehow, the Christian's view of the universe is completely different from anybody else's. One word that sums up the feeling of most people with regard to the world today is 'hopeless'. This is not a new thing, for Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians that once they had no hope, and were without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)

Now, if we look to closely at the world, and consider some of the things that happen there, we might indeed come to the conclusion that it is a world without hope. Nothing seems to change. Some people go on acting brutally, even those in positions of power; and ordinary people are tempted to despair. Paul was well aware that men feel that they are trapped in a world they do not seem to fit into. There seems so much good, so much that is lovely, and so much that is wonderful. Yet there is also so much that is bad.

And that is what Paul means here where he says – **For the creation was subjected to futility** (Romans 8:20). What does he mean? Well, **futility** is a Greek word not used very often in the New Testament. It is found more often in the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Ecclesiastes (the Preacher) where it occurs more than thirty times, and is translated in the King James Bible (AV) as **vanity**. This has nothing to do with people's appearance, but with their lack of purpose. This philosophical book in the Old Testament seeks to counsel those who have come to the conclusion that life has no meaning. That is the main argument of the book. The conclusion that the men in Solomon's court came to is found in Ecclesiastes 1:2 – **Vanity of vanities, all is vanity**. What is this **vanity** that brought so much despair and hopelessness? The Hebrew word has several meanings. It means 'emptiness',

sometimes 'foolishness', and in particular 'religious error'. In other words, it is looking at life and failing to seeing God in it.

In chapter 12:1, the writer actually mentions God – **Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth**. Here are the young men of the court, full of despair, and attempting to fill in their need with prosperity and materialism. Riches and luxury led them only to the point of despair. Solomon advised them to return to their Creator. Without him, life is futile, full of vanity. It is empty, and without purpose. There can be no purpose without God.

Consider Psalm 39:5 – **Indeed, you have made my days as handbreadths**. What a curse is the shortness of human life! He continues – **And my age is as nothing before you. Certainly every man at his best state is but vapour**. Men feel as if they should live forever, but their bodies tell them otherwise. When old age comes, men ask, 'Where did the time go?' Men's hearts are in step with eternity, but their bodies speak of a short time. James wrote – **For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away**. This is the curse resulting from mankind's fall into sin. God made man to live forever, but, because of his sin and pride and hardness of heart, his commandment keeps coming back to haunt him – **In the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die**. (Genesis 2:17) So life is short, with a human spirit that rebels at the thought of an end.

Now, Paul says, **For the creation was subjected to futility**. As they lay the bodies of their loved ones in the earth, men cry out 'Oh, the futility of it all!' Paul has already spoken in Romans of the fact that we were born into the world as sinners: born with a sinful nature, and with a predisposition to sinful deeds. The whole universe was caught up in the foolish fall into sin by Adam at the beginning, sucked into a vortex of despair and hopelessness and purposelessness.

(2) Walking in futility

In Ephesians 4:17-18, Paul speaks of the worst price of all that must be paid for the foolishness of Adam. Mankind knows the truth, but denies it – **This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart**. Here is fully exposed the utter futility of human life, that it is possible to know the truth – that there is a Creator of the universe, that he loves us, that he cares for us, that he sent his Son into the world to redeem us and make us his children. Yet, knowing all that, men refuse him because his mind has become darkened. They prefer the pain and futility of life rather than admit their sin and turn to God in repentance. Jesus said, **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, because their deeds were evil**. (John 3:19-20) They prefer their sins rather than be exposed and come to receive the forgiveness of God. Were we not like that once? It was God, in his grace, who made it possible for us to come to Christ and receive him as Saviour. We were once caught up in the futility of the universe. Thank God, that by his grace we have been delivered!

God said to the guilty pair, **Cursed is the ground for your sake** (Genesis 3:17). And that curse has been sustained through the centuries by the sins of men. But God has removed the curse for his children. We have been redeemed; and one day, the universe will be redeemed and be brought into a state of perfection. What God has done that for his children he will do for the universe. Not only is he restoring an uncountable number of men and women, making them his children, but there will come a time when he will restore this universe to the perfection from which it fell as a result of the Fall. **We hope for what we do**

not see (24-25) God subjected the creation **in hope** (20) It is not a hoping for the best. It is the certainty that when God makes a promise, he keeps it. He has in mind **new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells** (2 Peter 3:13). There is hope that the creation itself will also be set free from its enslavement to corruption, following the pattern of the freedom of the children of God.

When we come before God, we will be glorified – **whom he justified, these he also glorified**. (Romans 8:30) We will fully reflect the glory of Jesus Christ when we are with him, and there will be no distortion due to sin. So too the universe will become like a flawless gem, fully reflecting the glory of God. That is what God will do; and that is our hope.

(3) The present distress

For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now (22). The pangs of childbirth are extremely painful. Yet the pain is soon forgotten with the joy of a new baby in the family. When God said that he would increase the pains of childbirth, he intended to remind the human race of the fact that it inhabits a spoilt and sinful world. But there is hope within that pain and sorrow; the hope of a baby to come. Now, as the universe groans and travails, there is hope of a new life to come. When the pangs cease, the pain will be gone, and the new will arrive. Martin Luther comments – **But then, delivered from corruption, [the creation] will serve the children of God in glory**.

In Mark 13:7-8, Jesus mentions some of the calamities of the world – **And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows [birth pangs]**. But there is hope to come. God is working his purposes out. If God has redeemed us, we can trust him to redeem the universe. The two are bound up together. When you rejoice in your salvation, think of the joy that is still to come with the restoration of the universe in which God has placed us. We trust in a God who is bringing these terrible things to a wonderful fulfilment, with the restoration of all things in Christ. God is always in control. Indeed, God made these things for Christ – **All things were created through him and for him**. (Colossians 1:16) We have a Saviour who reigns, a Saviour who rules, and a Saviour who is coming again to receive us to himself. Here is the hope of glory for a fearful and suffering universe.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 30

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Isaiah 53:3

1. Which 4 words in this verse show the suffering state of the coming Messiah?
2. Are these words sometimes applicable to Christians?

Read Revelation 21:4

3. Who are being described here? (See verse 3)
4. What 4 things will be absent in the blessedness of eternity?

Read Matthew 5:5

5. What is another word for 'meek'?
6. What 7 other kinds of believers will be blessed?

Read John 1:12

7. What special right is given to believers?
8. Who gives them this right? (See verse 13)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:7-8

9. Which words describe the attitude of those who await Christ's coming?
10. What will Christ do to his people?
11. How will they be when they appear before God?

Read Exodus 34:29-35

12. What was unusual about the appearance of Moses?
13. What effect did this have on the people?
14. What did Moses do about it?

Read 1 Peter 1:13

15. Where is Christian hope centred?
16. When will this be fully experienced?

Read 1 John 3:1-2

17. What wonderful things is the result of God's love?
18. What effect will the coming again of Christ have on believers?

Read Ephesians 2:12

19. Being 'without Christ' involved 2 things. State them.
20. Why were they without hope?
21. What does Christ do about this? (See verse 13)

Read Ecclesiastes 1:2 (Refer to the exposition)

22. Give another name for 'vanity'.
23. What has become subject to 'vanity'?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1

24. To whom is the Preacher commending the Creator? (See also 11:10)
25. What is the significance of the 'Remember'? (See Romans 1:19-20)
26. What 2 things does God require of every human being? (See verse 13)

Read Psalm 39:5

27. What does this verse say about man's lifespan?
28. To what is man's life compared?
29. Which verse in James chapter 4 says the same thing?

Read Genesis 2:17

30. What was God's first commandment to Man?
31. What was the result of Man's disobedience?

Read Ephesians 4:17-18

32. In what 4 ways does Paul describe the 'futile mind'?

Read John 3:19-20

33. For which 2 reasons is the world condemned?
34. What is the light that the world hates? (See John 1:1-5)
35. What does a true believer do? (See verse 21)

Read Genesis 3:17

- 36. Why did the ground become cursed?
- 37. Why was the action of Adam bad?

Read 2 Peter 3:13

- 38. What does God promise at the end?
- 39. Which word is used to describe this new state?
- 40. What will happen to the old heavens? (See verse 12)

Read Mark 13:7-8

- 41. Which 5 catastrophes characterise this present age?
- 42. When will the end be? (See verse 26)
- 43. Why do we not know the time of the event? (See verse 32)

Read Colossians 1:16

- 44. Who is the 'him' in this verse?
- 45. For whom did God create all things?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

In this section, Paul refers to the great suffering to which the creation is subjected. This involves believers and unbelievers.

- (1) To what kind of suffering is Paul referring?
- (2) Why does Paul use the illustration of a woman in childbirth?
- (3) What encouragement can a believer find in such suffering?

C. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Prepare and preach a sermon that you think would interest your congregation, using material from this study.

The title of your sermon will be:

THE EVENTS OF TODAY, TOMORROW, AND THE END.

Send in an outline of your sermon, with all the Bible verses that you quoted.

STUDY 31

WHEN OUR TRIALS ARE OVER

ROMANS 8: 19-25

EXPOSITION

The words of Romans 8:23 come as shock compared with the words of triumph at the end of chapter 7 and the beginning and end of the chapter. It is surprising to read this – **We ourselves groan within ourselves.**

Suffering and a crisis of confidence

It has taken a great deal of effort and time so far to study Romans 8, and we have a way to go yet! Romans chapter 8 is a complex chapter where many themes are woven together. The question of Christian suffering demands closer scrutiny, for it touches in particular on the practical subject of Christian suffering. It is an inspiring chapter, for it deals, among other things, with the basis of Christian confidence. As we look out at the world, we find that people are very far from confident. As we look closely at their lives, we see that there is little there to boost their confidence. Indeed, we must say that, if the Christian faith cannot help and sustain us in times of trouble, then we should get rid of it, because it is not work. And indeed, as we look at Romans 8, we discover there a true faith that touches us at our deepest point of need.

There are many things that happen to us which could cause a crisis in confidence. We find many Christians looking for some personal higher spiritual experience that will somehow act in making them different people. There is no such teaching in the New Testament. What we do find is that, at a particular point of special need, the Lord helps us in a specially gracious way. Here is the testimony of the Apostle Paul – **And he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** We will consider these words in greater detail later. There is no guarantee in the Christian life against disaster. Our salvation does not make our lives immune to hardship. We live in a world where God does not show any special favour to his children with regard to adversities. What he promises is to keep us in them, and to take us safely through them; but he does not promise to remove them. He promises only to give us strength in our weaknesses.

Paul has been defining the grounds of Christian confidence in Romans 8. Where do Christians find their peace? How do they sustain their joy? How can they remain calm in times of turmoil and stress, and almost unendurable pain and suffering?

Our natural reaction is to ask, 'How could God allow anything like that to happen to me? I mean, after all, I am a believer in Jesus Christ!' The fact of the matter is that God has no short cut for turning us into perfect Christians. We are all different, and our circumstances vary greatly. Our faith is often imperfect in times of trouble. But the Lord helps us, in such

times, to rise above the circumstances, and grow in our faith. The outcome is something really special in all cases.

We cannot afford to give the devil the smallest place in our lives during times of trouble, and thus take away our confidence. The solution is clear: we must learn to trust the Lord. We must put our salvation into practice – **Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to work on behalf of his good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13) We must come to a closer understanding of it. We must study the Scriptures. We must take hold of the promises of God and apply them to ourselves. We need to grow in our Christian life. Then, assurance will come. God causes times of difficulty in the Christian life in order to advance our faith.

Now, then, what are the grounds of Christian assurance? We have looked at them in Romans 8. Let us take two of them. If you look closely at verses 12-17, you will find the most important point that Paul makes concerning the subject of assurance in the Christian life. When difficulties arise, we are bound to express our failure in understanding why God has allowed these things to happen to us. Even worse, we may have cause to doubt whether we are Christians. When things go badly, we can hardly bring ourselves to pray, and the fire of faith burns low. We feel that we have let ourselves down, and other Christians too. Worst of all, we feel that we have let the Lord down.

How can we know that we are true Christians? Well, the answer is to realise that we are not alone. When we first had faith in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, we also received God's Holy Spirit. That is what Paul is saying in verses 12-16 – **Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit** [that is, with the help of the Holy Spirit] **you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God** [we have a helper here], **these are the sons of God.** We have a leader, a guide, and a helper with us. **For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'** **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.** Even in our pain and stress, even when we hardly know which way to turn, it is at such times that the Christian will know the comfort, the strengthening, the power, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We have an inner witness who renews our assurance that we are the children of God.

Going back to verses 10-11, we discover that there is a link between our spiritual and our physical resurrection. What we must do when we lack assurance is to think back to what the Lord has done for us. We remember the day when we first had faith in the Lord Jesus. How different things were after that – for a while! We remember the joy that came to us. We remember the sense of relief when we knew that our sins were forgiven, and that we were made clean from every sin. How peaceful it was to put our head on our pillow at night, knowing that if the Lord brought our lives to an end during our sleep, then we knew where we were going and what the Lord would say to us when we got there! How lovely to feel clean and confident! Now, as we think back, consider what God did for us then. Can we really think that God will go back on that, and will he ever desert us? No; God never changes; only we change.

Now, if God redeemed our souls, then there will come a time when God will redeem our bodies. Consider verse 10 – **And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.** Our bodies are dying through weakness,

but our souls come alive when we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what it says here in verse 11 – **But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in you.** When will that be? In the resurrection. When Christ comes again, he will raise our bodies from the dust of the earth. We will have a new body when **this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.** (1 Corinthians 15:53) We will then possess a new and perfect body to fit the renewed and perfect soul for which Christ died. Now, that should give us confidence. But the problem is, you see, that, at the moment, we are redeemed souls living in imperfect and perishing bodies in an imperfect world that is suffering.

Suffering and the Christian

The Lord does not save us then remove us from the world with all its pain and suffering. The world **groans and labours** (22) We are involved in that also. **We ourselves groan within ourselves** (23) We are not removed from this process. We are still here for a purpose until such times when we are fully adopted and fully redeemed. Christians. Then, and only then, will we be free from suffering. A link is found in verse 18 – **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is to be revealed in us.** There is a connection between the resurrection and the glory that will be revealed in us. In the meantime, we have are redeemed souls in imperfect bodies. We need hope, and the insight to look forward to the time when suffering will come to an end, and there will be no more tears, no more sorrow, and no more pain. (Revelation 21:4)

The witness of the Spirit in the Christian and the fact that Christians look forward eagerly to full salvation in the resurrection are linked together in verses 23-25 – **but we also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.**

Suffering and the witness of the Holy Spirit

In verse 23, Paul speaks of our personal suffering, and our reaction to it – **but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves.** It seems that the older we get, the more we groan! The stresses and strains of life begin to show, and we feel burdened. Now, will it continue like that forever? The answer is, 'No, not at all!'

As we consider the unanswerable problem of Christian suffering, we need to move on to verse 24 where Paul encourages believers not to lose hope – **for we were saved in this hope.** When we had faith in Christ, we had the whole world to live for, and eternity too. When we were saved, it was like a new beginning; and, in fact, that is exactly what it was. (2 Corinthians 5:17) It was a new start, giving us a great hope that things would be different. So Paul warns, **We were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope.** There is something coming that we have not yet seen, and we trust the Lord to bring it upon us. **We hope;** but it is not a hope when someone whistles in the dark to keep his spirits up, but a special kind of hope. We often say, 'I hope it works out all right.' That implies a sense of uncertainty. Christian hope is nothing like that; it is based on the certainty of God's promises.

And if God does not keep his promises, he cannot be God. A God of truth always keeps his promises to his children. All we need to do is read them in the Bible, and remind God of them; for he is obliged to keep them. It is as good as having a chequebook from the Bank of Faith in heaven.

Patience and perseverance

We need to persevere. **We eagerly wait for it with perseverance.** (24) That hits us hard because, from time to time, we are tempted to give up. We throw our hands up in despair and say, 'Oh, it seemed all right at the beginning, but now I can't carry on any more. It is too much for me.' At such a time, the Christian needs to persevere.. So the Lord encourages us to wait eagerly with perseverance.

How do we get into this attitude of perseverance? Well, the answer is to renew our trust in God, and receive as a gift from God this fruit of the Spirit – **long-suffering** (Galatians 5:22; **patience** in the NIV). What is the point in being a Christian if the Lord is not there to help us? The Lord preserves those who put their trust in him. That is what Paul is saying to us here. We persevere on the basis of God's promise to help us. There is another fruit of the Spirit that accompanies patience – **faithfulness**. A faithful Christian is one who goes on; who does not give up. The Lord does not expect us to cast around looking for resources, and hoping for the best; he gives us through his Spirit patience, perseverance, and faithfulness. Christ himself declared – **But he who endures to the end shall be saved.** (Matthew 24:13)

There is a strong encouragement to go on. We may say to ourselves, 'Well, I don't know why this is happening to me, and I don't how I have come so far in the Christian life, but here I am, all praise to God! **EBENEZER: Thus far the Lord has helped us.** (1 Samuel 7:12) The reason for this is what God is doing in us. The Holy Spirit is at work, moving us forward spiritually, and giving us grounds for Christian confidence.

There are many Christians looking for some sort of extraordinary experience in their Christian lives when they believe everything afterwards will go well after some kind of breakthrough in their spiritual experience when everything will go right after that, and nothing could possibly go wrong. That certainly was not the experience of the Apostle Paul, nor anyone else in the New Testament. Paul writes – **We also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body.** (8:23)

Here is the fifteenth occasion when the Holy Spirit is mentioned in chapter 8. How very dependent we are on him! John Calvin wisely wrote, 'God does not call his people to triumph before he has exercised them in the warfare of suffering. But since it has pleased God to cherish our salvation close to his bosom, it is expedient for us to toil on earth, to be oppressed, to mourn, to be afflicted, indeed to lie as though half-dead, or like the dead ... Hope has been appointed by God as the guardian of salvation.'

The next question we ask is this: 'How can we know that we have the Holy Spirit? That is a very important question. If the Holy Spirit helps us to persevere in our troubles, how do we know that the Holy Spirit dwells in us? I think there are two answers to that, and Paul gives them both.

(1) First, by the fact that we are redeemed, that we are born again, that we have come into a new life – **we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit** ... The first fruit the Holy Spirit produces in the believer is new life in Christ. He brings the very life of Christ into a saved sinner's life. That we are born again is a work of the Spirit (John 3:5-8). It is impossible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. We read earlier in this chapter Paul's stern words – **Now, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.** (9) Therefore, the opposite must be true: if we have Christ, we have the Holy Spirit. There is no Christian life without the Holy Spirit. And here is the ground of Christian assurance. If the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and grants us this inward witness, we will also possess this power to overcome our difficulties in very troubled times.

(2) Second, that the Holy Spirit proves his indwelling by producing spiritual fruit. There are three mentioned or implied here.

First, the fact that we become impatient with the world. We become dissatisfied with this life. Somehow, we are in it but are not of it. And that is certainly sure evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. **We ourselves groan within ourselves.** We grow impatient of this life and desire to leave it. We do not belong here for we are strangers and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11).

Job had to learn this painful lesson. He lived easily with the things of this world for the simple reason that he had plenty of them. He had security, a large family, and the love of his wife and family. He had riches in abundance and plenty of cattle. He had everything that he needed, and it was all taken away from him, including his health. He had to learn to depend on God without reservation. In the last chapter of Job, we read these words – **I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I repent in dust and ashes.** (42:6) There is another sign of a true believer; he is humble because he has learnt to trust God entirely in all the circumstances of his life.

Second, a longing for the second coming of Christ. Paul continues, **...waiting eagerly for the adoption, the redemption of the body.** The time when Christ returns is what Paul calls our hope – **For we were saved in this hope ... we wait eagerly for it with perseverance.** What is the Christian's hope? Consider these important words of encouragement – **looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.** (Titus 2:13) The appearing of Jesus Christ is the Christian hope; and when he comes, the world will be a very different place altogether!

Third, a determination to endure – **we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.** Now, as Christians, we have much to complain about. The Bible records many of the complaints that were directed to God. However, we have a fine and better example in Paul.

The example of the Apostle Paul

Now, when we find life unendurable and too difficult, and believe that our Christian life is coming to a disastrous end, consider the things that happened to the Apostle Paul (who never complained) in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

'... in labours, more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was

shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brothers; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.'

Does that not make us feel better! What was the secret of Paul's confidence in such pressing circumstances? He learned three things.

First, he learned, most importantly, to trust God. He goes on to report what Christ told him – **My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** His response to this was – **Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10) He learnt to trust Christ.

Secondly, he found peace. How may a believer find true peace when things go so devastatingly wrong? Well, here is the answer – **I have learned in whatever state I am to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** (Philippians 4:11-13) What, then, is the secret of Christian perseverance? What sustains the Christian in any circumstance? Paul testified that was Christ himself who helped him. Christ is the origin and source of our spiritual strength; it cannot be found in ourselves.

Thirdly, Paul leaned the future tense of the spiritual life, and thus had a goal to strive towards. And here it is – **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.** (Romans 8:18) To learn more of that glory, we need to go on to Study 33. Christians are not comfortably settled in this world, for there is infinitely better one to come. Aurelius Augustine, the great 4th Century bishop and theologian, wrote, 'The soul is at home much more where the object of love is, than in the body which it animates.'

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 31

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Philippians 2:12-13

1. What is the difference between working for our salvation, and working out our salvation?
2. What does God work in us? (See verse 13)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:52-54

3. When will our bodies be changed? (See verse 52)
4. What do the words 'incorruption' and 'immortality' mean?
5. Where in Isaiah does the quotation in verse 54 come from?

Read Revelation 21:4

6. What will God do for us in heaven?
7. Which 4 things will disappear forever?
8. Which eight types of people will be excluded from heaven?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

9. Through whom are we made new creatures?
10. What happened to the old sinful life?

Read Galatians 5:22

11. What are the **nine 'fruit of the Spirit'**?
12. Which two of them are directly related to perseverance in the Christian life?

Read Matthew 24:13-14

13. Who will be saved?
14. When will the end come?

Read 1 Samuel 7:12

15. Who set up a memorial stone?
16. What did he call it?
17. What was the meaning of its name?

Read John 3:5-8

18. What other name did Jesus give for '**born of the Spirit**'? (See verses 3, 7)
19. Is it possible to understand the work of the Spirit? (See verse 8)

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12

20. What exactly is a 'pilgrim', and a sojourner' (stranger)?
21. How should Christians behave among the Gentiles?

Read Job 42:5-6

22. What does the phrase '**hearing of the ear**' tell us about Job's imperfect relationship with God?
23. When Job came into a good relationship with God, what were the first two things that he did?

Read Titus 2:13-14

24. What is the Christian's 'blessed hope'?
25. What were the two purposes of Christ's first coming?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

26. What nine unpleasant things did Paul experience?
27. How many perils did Paul pass through?
28. How do we know that Paul was anxious about the state of the churches?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

29. These verses are quoted twice in different parts of the sermon.

Read the sermon again where they appear, and explain what you think the message was that the preacher sought to convey in those places.

Read Philippians 4:11-13

30. What lesson did Paul learn from his difficult and painful experiences?
31. What else did he learn? (See verse 19)

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) From the sermon, explain why God allows his children to suffer?
- (2) Answer these questions about the future:
 - (a) What picture of the next life do we have in Revelation 21?
 - (b) Why is this chapter very suitable for Christian funerals?

C. PRACTICAL

As an illustration for a sermon on Christian suffering:

- (1) **Say which conditions have been or are applicable to you in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.**
- (2) **Write in full the experience of either yourself, or someone known to you in your congregation, greatly helped by the Lord during a time of great suffering.**

STUDY 32

A GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

ROMANS 8:28

EXPOSITION

In Romans chapter 8, we find some of the choicest verses in the Bible. So, when we come to verse 28, we feel that we are on familiar ground – **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.** In other versions we read – **We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God ...** This second version is excellent, for it puts all circumstances into God's loving hand, and encourages us to trust him.

God's sovereign purposes in the world

We live in a fallen and sinful society where God is not in the thoughts of men. (Psalm 10:4) There is little acknowledgement of God in newspapers and in radio and television programmes. In view of the fact that there is much trouble in the world, so much strife, so much conflict, there is no acknowledgement that God is in control. And if people have any thoughts about God, and if they acknowledge the existence of God, they will be sure to say, 'Well, if there is a God, he has surely messed it up! God cannot be in control, for if he is the God of power, look at the world. How does this reflect his power? Well then, some God! But some mess!'

Now, some Christians unconsciously import this wordly attitude into their Christian lives. When things go wrong, their immediate thought is 'Well, if God is God, he is sovereign, and he must be in control. If he is not in control of this, it cannot be in his will.' Or worse still, they may say, 'The Devil is in control of this.' Both of these statements are untrue. The Devil is in control of no circumstance, except by God's permission. This is a good point to bring in the gospel, for the one thing any gospel preacher can be sure about some of his hearers is that they will be struggling with the adversities of life, and will be feeling defeated. The gospel begins with a God who is in control. This loving God calls us to trust in him.

We begin with the assumption – as indeed all Christians must, and the whole Bible teaches – that God is Lord. As God created the world, he continues to protect and control it, and to manifest his goodness in it. Here, amid all the puzzling difficulties of life, is an anchor for the troubled soul. Romans 8:28 stands supreme among other verses in this chapter in bringing great comfort and strength to Christians, enabling them to endure the unendurable, and to persist in the impossible. They know that God is in control of all things. In fact, they know that God is not only in control, but that he is personally interested in their welfare. They know from the Bible that God is interested in all things that happen to them, perhaps over a short period, or over years, when circumstances are bad, when they are unendurable, and when they are so overwhelming that they hardly know which way to turn.

The truth we are called to faithfully preach is that God allows these things to happen **according to his purpose.** If we believed that there is no purpose in these things, then we would do what increasing numbers of people are doing, and kill ourselves in the face of the unendurable. Suicide is the response of many people to the conclusion that there is no

purpose in their lives. When terrible things come to them, they have no answer except, 'I cannot bear them any more.'

All things for good

Now, Christians know that God is not only in control of all circumstances in general, but he is in control of our own personal circumstances in particular, however hard they turn out to be. God has a purpose in allowing us to go through suffering, and assures us that ultimately it will be for our good. Surely the characteristic of a true Christian is that he can say, 'Well, I know that these things are hard for me to bear, and I have endured them for a long time, but I believe that God has allowed them to come to me for good.' Now, that is real faith. It is a faith based not on wishful and hopeful thinking but on our knowledge of God's character, and on our experience of him, and in particular on our sense of the love of God which **has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.** (Romans 5:5)

There are two lines of thought we may trace out in Romans chapter 8, both of which are very wonderful. They are: **firstly**, that Christians need, from time to time, to be assured of who they are. They need to feel confident that they really are Christians in the face of doubts that come in and tend to destroy their peace of mind. They seek ways in which God assures them that they are his children. They learn that nothing can change that fact. **Secondly**, when we come towards the end of this chapter, after being assured that we are God's children, we are also reassured of this fact in adverse circumstances.

Now, in this chapter we move on to this second area of assurance. Not only can we come to God in prayer at any time in all our difficulties, but we are assured that those difficulties are allowed to come to us by God. That sounds very hard to accept, does it not? God allows these things to come to us because it is part of his plan and purpose for our lives. In some way, of course, it could lay God open to a charge of unfairness, whereby some people seem to get off lightly, and live an almost trouble-free life, while others endure terrible, sorrowful things, and are inclined to blame God for being unjust.

So we come now to this further reassurance concerning the work of God – the purpose of God in our lives – **For we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes.** Some decorated garments have interesting patterns. Now, if you turn the material over, have you looked at the pattern on the other side? If you do this, you will find it difficult to make sense of it, because it looks a mess. Here is one colour going one way and another colour going another, with little reference to the final pattern. However, when you turn the material the right way round, you will see the perfect pattern. Christians too often look at their problems in the wrong way. They look at the material from the inside, whereas they should be looking at the pattern the right way.

We are told here in verse 28 that the right way is this: if we look at our sorrows, problems, pains, anxieties, hardships, adversities, and everything else that God brings to us, in the right way, we will make sense of them. Or perhaps we should say that, at a later date, God will open our eyes to see the true pattern of these things – **those who love God and are called according to his purposes.** We start many projects with a view to finishing them. Some we complete, but they look a mess! Other we do not finish at all. But God can never do that. God always brings things to a perfect conclusion – **We know that God causes all things to work together for good.** That is a strong affirmation – **We know.** What does it mean? It means above all that we face our circumstances with a sense of knowing God. It is wrong to say to a man of the world, 'there is a plan and a purpose in these things for you', without adding that he needs to have a personal knowledge of God who is behind these things, and who has a purpose in them, a good and loving God who is kind to all his children.

For we know, wrote Paul. How could Paul say this, after all the troubles he had experienced? He was obviously sympathetic to those Christians in Rome who were at that time actually passing through times of affliction and trouble. How could Paul say **we know** with such certainty? His was not hopeful wishing, but a certainty that all things would work together for good. How did he know? Surely because he knew his God. He knew also that **as a father pities his children, so the Lord knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.** (Psalm 103:13-14). Not a thing can happen to us without God knowing and caring and being in control. We know that God knows.

The example of Job

On turning to Job 42:1-4, we recall that Job had been extremely depressed at the way in which his life had turned out. Without going into all the circumstances, we can summarise by saying that he lost practically everything except his life. Here, in the conclusion of the book, we find Job's words to be a comfort to those who are going through difficult times themselves. This is what he says – **Then Job answered the Lord and said: I know that you can do everything, and that no purpose of yours can be withheld from you.** (1-2) In other words, God's purposes can never be changed, can never be stopped, can never be hindered, and can never be thwarted. What God purposes always comes to pass. Paul comments – ... **who are the called according to his purposes.** Job 42:3 continues – **You asked, Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand.** Job admits his limitation in his understanding, and casts himself upon the power and mercy of God who helps him understand. What sort of things concerning God did Job admit? Well, that God knew more than he did – **things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.** We take great pride in thinking that we run our own lives.

At the beginning of our lives, we thought: 'It will work out like this. I have the abilities. I know I will do certain things. I will go to school for so many years. I will study. I will be trained in such a way. Then I will get married and have so many children. We will buy a house and we will work out our lives.' That is how we thought it would work out, imagining that we would do the right thing at the right time. But it did not, did it? Oh no, it didn't! Along the way, we found that the strong knots came apart, and circumstances did not knit together as we hoped. The chances that we thought would come along never did. Disappointment came in their place. There are many things that cause people to feel sorrowful and bitter. Yet God permits hardships to come in a good cause – the loss of a job, physical incapacity, and so many other things. How can we say that God has a purpose in these things? How dare we declare that God has his hand in them for the good of his children?

God's children may become physically or mentally disabled. They may experience a rift in their marriages. How can we say that God has a hand in these things? But Christians say with assurance that God **causes all things to work together for good.** Unless we accept that, then we become bewildered and frustrated and bitter. But if we accept that God has a purpose in these things, we will know such a joy and peace that we never knew before. And this is what happened in the case of Job. He said, **Listen, please and let me speak. I will question you, and you shall answer me.** (4) Here is a man who has entrusted his life to the God he has come to know personally. **I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.** In other words, he has not an intellectual belief that God is in control of the universe, but a deep-felt trust in his heart. Not only did he acknowledge God's name, but he trusted him with his very soul, and with every part of his being. This was because, like Paul, he knew that God knows.

Where does this knowing begin for the Christian? If we know that God acknowledges us, and cares for us, how can we know God? Where does it begin? This question is excellent for the application of the gospel message. Consider where Job began in chapter 19:25. This was the turning point for Job after his desire for the Lord to kill him, because he could not take any more. Then comes this wonderful thought to Job that it is God's right to take away his life if he wished. But in any case, declares Job, despite all the terrible things that have come to me – **I know that my Redeemer lives**. You see, there was a great change from an outward form of sincere religion when he was able to say, 'I know my God', to this verse in which he confesses his Saviour. 'I know that I have a Redeemer. I know my Redeemer.' Here is a prophecy fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Job also, in days of great ignorance, had an advanced knowledge of resurrection and life beyond death, and entrusted himself to a God who would cause him to survive in a better life – **And he shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!** (Job 19:25-27)

The example of the Apostle Paul

In Philippians 3:10, Paul writes of the chief end of his life amid so much hardship and suffering – **that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings**. To know Christ was the object of the apostle's life, and it helped him endure so much. Now, we may challenge our listeners at this point by asking them: 'Do you know Christ like that, so that you can entrust your sorrows and suffering to him? Will you entrust your lives to the Lord, and say: **I know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes**'?

A personal experience of Christ in times of trouble

When a Christian finds himself in difficulty in times of problems, worries, cares, perplexities, and all else that belongs to the human condition, Romans 8 verse 28 becomes the bedrock of his Christian life. Without its truths, there is no real Christian life. He may know them, even preach them, yet somehow they do not touch the very depth and being of his life. He needs to assimilate them by personal experience. The result is, that the Lord keeps on bringing him the same lesson until it is well learned. God often reinforces this by bringing forward the same verse over and over again, particularly when the believer is passing through a time of trouble.

It is as if God says, 'Here are the words. What is your experience?' He reinforces the truths, saying 'You say that you believe; prove it by trusting me.' **For we know**. How do we know? Why do we know? Do we really know the God who declares that we should trust him? Is it true that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him**? Is that true in the preacher's experience, and in the listener's experience? Was it true in Paul's experience? Is he not including himself when he says, **for we know**? The chief object of the apostle's life was, as he says in Philippians 3:10 – **that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings**'. With that sort of relationship, Christians can never go wrong. Here is the bedrock that never shifts in the worst of circumstances. If we know Christ in this way, we will never be moved, whatever comes up against us. Jesus declared – **the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.**' (Matthew 7:25) And that rock is Jesus Christ. The rock is also what Jesus said and taught, and what we believe. Our rock is Christ and his word. If we know him like that, we will surely **know that all things work together for good to those who love God**.

What greater disaster could have come to Christ's disciples than to see him taken forcibly away from them, betrayed, tortured, and then executed on a Roman cross? What was worse for this little group of disciples than seeing their beloved master and friend treated in such a way? For them, it was the end of the world, a complete and total disaster. There was no way forward that they could see. There was an emptiness in their hearts and lives. There was total bewilderment. For some, there was the pain of remembering lost opportunities, like Peter with his denials. For others, like Thomas, there was a shameful doubt that anything good could come to pass. Perhaps a hardness lay on the hearts of other of the disciples. But, you see, God brought good out of the most evil and horrible thing that ever happened to Jesus. From the very beginning, God intended the cross, for he was the only one who was capable of bringing good out of it. It was in the hand of God alone to bring good out of evil.

**I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the LORD, do all these things.**
(Isaiah 45:7)

Now, only God can bring something out of nothing – **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth** (Genesis 1:1). They never existed, and then they did exist. God brought something out of nothing. If God can do that, surely he can bring good out of evil! That is what Christians believe, and that is what we know and experience. God brings things out for our good as an act of love to us, and creates good out of an evil that appears to us to be bitter and unacceptable. God does this for us; and it is wonderful. He brings hope and joy and endurance and perseverance, making them bear testimony before the world that Jesus Christ is alive. God is our helper, and we shall not be moved. (Psalm 54:4) The God of all grace is ever-present with us to help us in times of need. That is what Romans 8:28 is saying, and lies at the very heart of Paul's gospel. Indeed, it is the collective experience of the Christian Church.

How do we know that God causes all circumstances to work together for good for his children? The answer to that question must be, 'Because God can do no other.' He is good; it is the very nature of God to be good, and good in particular towards his children. Consider Psalm 25. Here is a Psalm describing how David's friends had turned traitor against him. He was in severe difficulty, and fell into a period of severe depression. He declares – **Let not my enemies triumph over me. Indeed ... let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.**' (2-3) He had been treated most unjustly, and in a terrible fashion, even by his own friends. He takes refuge in the truth concerning his God, in verse 8. He goes to the very heart of God's existence, saying, **Good and upright is the Lord.** God is just; for having accepted us as his children, he will never leave us or desert us. He never fails us or forsakes us because he is good and upright. It is the nature of God to do good because he is good. Then in Psalm 119:68 we read – **You are good, and do good; teach me your statutes.** Although God is good, it does not stay there. God is generous; he does not keep his goodness to himself. When God created the universe, it was a great act of goodness out of his heart. He did not need to create the universe, but he did it out of goodness. We exist because of God's goodness. But, you see, he is not a God who keeps his goodness to himself. He is not only good, but he does good. Whatever God does must be for good. But there is a great problem here for Christians. If we trust in God, and we have faith in Jesus Christ our Saviour, what do we say about things in our life that are not good, and asking endlessly, 'Why did God permit this? Why did he allow these things to happen to me? If God is good, he would not allow these things to happen to me.' But he does; and that is a problem.

Why does God allow bad things to happen to us?

The answer is that God allows them for our good because he is a good God. **You are good and do good.** How do we know? Well, by testing him. **Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man who trusts in him!** (Psalm 34:8). Here is the challenge of gospel preaching. How do we know that God is good? By inviting the hearers to test him, and taste of him. We earnestly command our hearers: 'Do not draw back. Cast yourself upon God. Walk into the unknown. Consider the goodness of God and receive of it. That is what God requires of you. Do not hold back. God is pleased to be put to the test. **Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.** Bring him your pain and sorrow. Bring him your heartache. Bring him your hardness and bitterness, for he is a God of love. Come before him and say, 'Can you do something about it?' And he will do good to those who love him.'

The example of Joseph

There was once a very young man in the Old Testament who loved God and put his trust in him. He wanted for nothing for he was his father's favourite. His brothers took exception to this, and became jealous of him. They eventually thought of a way to get rid of him, and sold him as a slave into Egypt. There he stayed, out of sight and out of mind, mourned by a father who thought that he had been killed by a wild beast. His name was Joseph, and while in prison, he endured the bitterness of slavery; but he never lost his faith in God. The result was, that the Lord blessed him beyond anyone else in Egypt, and he became well known and a favourite prisoner. Everyone treated him well, and with respect, including the Pharaoh who called him one day to come and interpret the dreams God had put into his mind. You will remember the well-known story: how famine brought his long-lost brothers to Egypt, not knowing how much Joseph had prospered. To their consternation, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers eventually, and they thought that their last hour had come! They had treated Joseph so badly that all they could expect was revenge. But so far had his faith advanced during the years of bitterness, of slavery, and of hardship, and of adversity, that Joseph gave his brothers a startling response – **Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?'** (Genesis 50:19) Then come these wonderful words, which contain sentiments which are echoed by the apostle in Romans 8:28. Joseph went on to say – **But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now, therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them'** (20-21) That is an admirable picture of Joseph, a child of God, who had grown into his heavenly father's image, reflected in his attitude towards other people. He saw God's hand in every circumstance, even the worst circumstance that had ever happened to him. **God meant it for good** – 'not only for my good but an uncountable number of other people over whom I have great influence.' God brought good out of evil. In the same way, Paul is saying that if we trust God, and are truly God's children, then he will **cause everything to work together for good to those who are the called according to his purposes.**

Called according to his purposes

Another key word in Romans 8:28 is **called**. Who are the children of God? Those who love God, those who are loved by God and those who are called by God according to his purposes. Who are **the called** mentioned here? Is Paul talking about a small group of favoured people upon whom God poured out his blessings, or everybody? For whom does God bring out every circumstances for good? Is it for all God's children everywhere and at all times? Well, the answer is in the phrase **the called**. Who are the called? Paul uses this interesting phrase in Romans 1:6 – **among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.**

The called of Jesus Christ should make us think immediately of such characters as Zacchaeus, the little man up a sycamore tree. What did Jesus do when he arrived under that tree? He called him by name – **Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.**’ (Luke 19:5) Jesus called him – **Today salvation has come to this house.** (9) We might remember another tax collector, hated by the people, the customs officer working in Capernaum in the north of Galilee, how Jesus, walking past this man, suddenly turned and called him, saying, **Follow me.** (Mark 2:14) Matthew left everything and followed him. Do you remember, preacher, the day Christ called you? Do you remember how God spoke to your heart by his Holy Spirit, and how you turned to him, committing your whole future and life to him? Do you remember how you asked him to forgive you and cleanse you from your sin? How you asked him to make you a child of God? How you believed in him with all your heart and soul? That was your call.

To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. (Romans 1:7) In other words, all the Christians in Rome were called by God to be saints. All the Christians in Rome were called saints. There are no favourites with God. Everyone is treated equally.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Someone in your congregation is bound to ask, ‘On what basis does God show his favour towards believers?’ I do not know whether we are capable of answering that question. The question ought to be addressed to God, for no one can know why God should show any mark of favouritism on him. We all ask, from time to time, ‘Why me? Of all the people in my area, or, in all the world, why me? Why should God be good to me?’ We cannot know the answer to that, either. Moses asked God the same question concerning the nation of Israel, and God gave a most unclear answer – **the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the people, for you were the least of all peoples. The Lord did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you.** (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) In other words, ‘I loved you ... because I loved you’! It does not help really, does it? Except that it is of the very essence of God to love, and do his people good. So why question him on this point?

2 Timothy 1:9-10

Another thing we can say with certainty is that God is never good to us on the basis of what we are, or of what we have done. Many people try to please God, and bring down his goodness and forgiveness and mercy, by trying to do good works. Israel was not chosen by God on the basis of works or strength. We can never please God by anything we do. What God does for us is out of his grace and goodness. **God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.** (2 Timothy 1:9-10) We thank God that we were known in God’s mind from all eternity; that God knew what would be our personal circumstances as part of his plans and purposes; that God would show his love and kindness to us by sending his Son Jesus Christ to cleanse us of our sins and take them away, to discover us in all our need and, in his grace, say to us, ‘I know that your life will be difficult. I know what you will go through, but I will be with you. My Son has already experienced all these things. He knows.’ **We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted in as we are, yet without sin.** (Hebrews 4:15) We have Christ to help us. As the children of God, we are **the called according to his purposes.** We trust Christ with all our hearts and souls, to the very last breath, and go on declaring the goodness of God in Christ which we experience in our lives as we pass through difficulties and adversities. God does indeed **cause everything**

to work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to his purposes.

Evangelism and Romans 8:28

All we have considered so far is very suitable for the encouragement and strengthening of believers. Romans 8:28 is, after all, **for those who love God, and are the called according to his purposes.** How, then, may this verse be used for evangelism? There are two answers to that question. **Firstly**, the verse can be used to show how the gospel of God's love fully answers the needs of all who are bewildered, even embittered, by the seeming unfairness of life, with all its individual suffering. How wonderful it is to know personally such a loving and caring God! **Secondly**, our own testimony of God being with us in our suffering, and his bringing good out of it, can be used to support the truths found in this verse. It is as Job said long ago – **For I know that my Redeemer lives**; therefore we may say with certainty, **we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.**

QUESTIONS ON STUDY 32

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Psalm 10:4

1. What is sinful about man that makes him not seek God?
2. What do you think the second part of this verse means?

Read Romans 5:5

3. Why is the believer's hope never disappointed?
4. How, in this verse, do we know that God is generous with his love?
5. Which word connects this verse with Romans 8:28?

Read Psalm 103:13-14

6. From God's point of view, what does **pity** mean?
7. What draws out God's pity for his children?
8. In verse 14, how is God the opposite of men?

Read Job 42:1-4

9. What word means God can do anything? Omni _____
(See also Revelation 19:6)
10. What was God's purpose for Job? (See verse 2)
11. Job uses a word to describe God's dealings with him in verse 3. Which one?
12. What do men naturally and sinfully do when bad things happen to them?
(See verse 4)

Read Job 19:25

13. Which word describes the Lord Jesus our Saviour?
14. What promise does God make to believers in verse 26?

Read Philippians 3:10

15. Paul had 4 objects in his Christian life. State them.

Read Matthew 7:25

16. Why did this house not fall down?
17. What was the foolish man's house built on?

18. What is the difference between the wise and foolish men in verse 26?

Read Isaiah 45:8

19. In verses 5 and 6, what does God say about himself?

20. Verse 7 (in the RAV) says that God permits two evil things to happen. What are they?

Read Psalm 54:4

21. What terrible problem did David have? (See verse 3)

22. What Did God do for David?

23. What did God do to his enemies?

Read Psalm 25:2-3, 8

24. What did David do among his enemies? (See verse 2)

25. What did David say about God? (See verse 8)

Read Psalm 119:68

26. What did the Psalmist desire because he knew that God did good?

Read Psalm 34:8

27. Which three things caused David to declare that God is good? See:
(1) Verse 4a (2) Verse 4b (3) Verse 6

28. If God is good, what should David do? (See verse 8)

Read Genesis 50:19-21

29. What **evil** did the brothers mean towards Joseph? (See Genesis 37)

30. What **good** did God mean? (See verse 20)

31. Did God bring good out of evil for Joseph?

Read Romans 1:6-7

32. Who called the Roman Christians?

33. What were they called to be?

Read Luke 19:5, 9

34. Who had a great surprise?

35. What did Jesus do? (See verse 5)

36. What did Jesus call this man to? (See verse 9)

Read Mark 2:14

37. What job did Matthew (Levi) have?

38. What did Jesus call him to do?

Read Deuteronomy 7:6-8

39. For what reason did God not call Israel?

40. Why did God choose Israel?

Read 2 Timothy 1:9-10

41. Upon what is our calling not based?

42. Why does God call us?

Read Hebrews 4:15

43. Who keeps a believer strong?

44. What title is used of him here?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

In Romans 8:28, Paul says something about the work of God in saving the Roman Christians.

(1) Underline in your Bible the following key words:

know; all things; good; love God; called; his purposes.

(2) Write about each of the words in (1), and say how they are related to our salvation.

C. PRACTICAL

Chose one member of your congregation (man or woman) who has been through a time of great difficulty or suffering.

Ask him (or her) to tell you how all things worked together for good in his (or her) life.

Write a report of his (or, her) testimony, and send it in.

STUDY 33

FOREKNOWN ... CONFORMED ... GLORIFIED!

ROMANS 8:29-30

EXPOSITION

There is nothing more God-honouring than the doctrines of Romans 8:29-30 – **For whom God foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** Here is a fitting declaration that summarises all the previous sections of the Letter. With the word **glorified**, we come to the end of the great theme that Paul has set out before us.

A reminder of the vast sweep of God's salvation in Paul's Letter to the Romans

Just as a reminder, here is a very brief description of the scope of God's saving plan. It began with the miserable fall of man into sin and God's anger and judgement (in chapters 1-2); of the need to exercise faith in Jesus Christ and respond to his love (in chapter 3); the example we see in Abraham, who was justified by faith alone, and who is the father of all those who have faith in Christ (in chapter 4). Then we come to the glorious chapter 5 which speaks of the result of our believing in Christ and our turning away from our sinful condition, looking only to Christ to save us – **Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God**, with all the wonderful results of this peace established by God for us sinners who have offended him by our sin, yet whose punishment fell on his Son, freeing us from all condemnation by the law of God. We now have access to God at any time, in prayer, in praise, or in any other way, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapters 6 and 7 go on to explain what happens to those who believe in Christ: deliverance from bondage to sin and the devil, from slavery, from the old life, from the old master, from guilt, from those things that weighed us down. Christ is our new master, and no one can take us away from him because he will never let us go. Chapter 7 explains why Christians, although belonging to Christ, still sin occasionally, and the devil comes and says, 'There you are, what did I tell you? You don't belong to God's side, you belong to me because you do the things that please me.' And he takes away our confidence. Chapter 7 was written to explain to the believer that, even though we might sin, there is no condemnation attached to that, and, in Christ, there is deliverance.

Chapter 8 states – **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.** If we are in Christ Jesus, we have the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation and put sin to death. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the answer to the wretched heart-cry at the end of chapter 7 – **O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?** God reminds us that there is no further condemnation. Our sins are forgiven. Christ shed his blood on the Cross so that they could be removed. So, if we sin, we are not un-saved. We do not lose our salvation because we slip back into the old ways from time to time. Christ died for us. 'Nevertheless,' says Paul, 'that does not give us an excuse for not

dealing with our sins.’ The rest of the chapter goes on to say how we should live the Christian life in complete confidence whose basis is in God. We should walk in the newness of the Spirit. We are not the same as we once were. Our lives have changed. ‘We have the Holy Spirit’, says Paul, ‘indwelling us’ – **If anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his**, he says sternly. Every true believer has the Spirit and his power to overcome these tendencies within us to sin. So the chapter encourages us not to look inward to ourselves and our failures, but outward to God who keeps us and meets our every need.

In Romans 8:28, we found a basis for fully committing ourselves to God in such a way that we say to God, ‘Whatever happens, I will trust you.’ The message we proclaim as gospel preachers is – trust our good God more and more. There is no end to the trust we place in God who loves us and cares for us. And when we do that, we will know joy, and grace, and blessing. **For we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes.** God requires us to do this one thing, and that is to trust him. Everything will work out well; everything will come out for good – even evil and vile things. How do we know that? Because we have a good God who cares for us, a God we can trust because he has a purpose in all these things. Oh! we become frustrated, and sometimes we experience the bitter circumstances of life. But if we trust God, and love him, we will discover his purpose, which is always for our good.

God’s foreknowledge

Now, Paul moves on. Not only does God require us to trust him, but we need to trust his purposes. And that is really what the next verse is saying – **for whom He foreknew ...** – that is, the part of his purpose that concerns us.

Consider Psalm 71:5. The word ‘trust’ occurs hundreds of times in the Bible. Here is one of them. The Psalm is a prayer of an old man for deliverance, who declares – **For you are my hope, O Lord God; you are my trust from my youth. By you I have been upheld from my birth; you are he who took me out of my mother’s womb. My praise shall be continually of you.** Here is an elderly man who has learned to stand up to anything that comes against him. His automatic reaction is to say, ‘O God, I trust you in this. Help me.’

Another great verse of trust is Psalm 40:4. There is always a happy outcome for those who trust in God – **How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust.** And what a blessing! Blessing always comes from trusting God. If we trust God in our circumstances, there will be nothing but blessing, and often unexpected. What wonderful things the Lord gives us to encourage us, and surprise us, and show that he loves us. If we trust him, it will be blessing all the way.

Let us now turn to Romans 8:29-30. What is God’s purpose for Christians, for those who have trusted in him, and entrusted themselves and their circumstances to him? **For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** Here are five precious jewels set in a cluster, and worn by every Christian. These jewels are: being foreknown, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. Paul, the gospel preacher, is concerned here to help the discouraged praise the Lord for every encouragement mentioned here. What we all need to do is to trust God in our present hard circumstances. Why? Because we have a sovereign God who has a purpose for our lives. It is a wonderful purpose, and it is part of his plan and purpose to involve foreknowledge and predestination and election and justification and glorification. These words – and great theological words they are – should bring the believer happiness and security.

Now, before we examine the meanings of these terms, let us continue with this need for believers to trust God and his saving purposes. Now, some in your congregation may have come recently to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. You will notice that their new relationship with him has brought about a change in their lives very similar to that described in Romans chapter 8, involving peace, joy, assurance, a prayer life, and many other things as well. Now, before very long, they will be asking this question, 'Why did God save me, and not someone else?' That is a very important question, not because we are important – far from it! – but because God's purpose is important. 'Why me?' The answer must surely be, 'Because it is God's purpose to save me.'

Two key words

There are two important words used here: **foreknew** and **conformed** – **for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.**

(1) Foreknowledge

'Those whom he foreknew'. What exactly is God's foreknowledge? Foreknowledge means to have knowledge of an event before it happens. It is not a guess, nor is it a hope, as far as God is concerned. It is the sure and certain knowledge of seeing an event happen before it does. Before the creation of the world, God foreknew all that would happen, all that would be said, all that would take place, from the beginning to the end. It is as though, in the mind of God, the event had already actually happened under his direction. That is how God sees things. The result is that whatever happens is part of God's plan and purpose, which existed in the mind of the Godhead even before the creation of the world.

Now, God's foreknowledge is not based on events that are undecided by God, or out of his sovereign control. The salvation of certain men and women was pre-determined in eternity – **just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he has made us accepted in the Beloved.** (Ephesians 1:4-6) The importance of God's foreknowledge lies in the fact that he knows beforehand those whom he will save. So we return to the original question: 'On what basis did God chose us?' Was it because he saw something good in us? No; as Paul says – **For by grace you have been saved ... not of works, lest anyone should boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9) It was the same with the nation of Israel.

Why did God choose Israel? Was it because he foreknew at a certain time that the nation would take Jehovah as her God? That they would promise to be obedient to him, and serve him? The answer to that must be 'No', because there never was such a small rebellious nation on the face of the earth! A reading of the Old Testament shows just how obstinate and rebellious the people were – always turning away from God to idols. God did not choose them because they chose God. Deuteronomy 7:7 tells us why God chose Israel – **For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.** In order to leave no room for pride, Moses continued – **The Lord did not set His love on you, nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you.** That is the sole reason why God chooses us to be his children – because he loves us. That is the reason why God chose Israel; and we know that Israel rejected Jesus Christ. Paul will expand this mighty theme in Romans 9-11, when he refers to Israel's rejection of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Finally, history changes, and it is the Church of Jesus Christ that becomes prominent in God's plans. In Ephesians 1:4-7, Paul speaks of God's choice as **before the foundation of the world**. Here is God's election of us, when, in his plan and purpose, he chose us in eternity. That is what foreknowledge means.

(2) Predestined

Secondly, God 'predestined' us. God has seen fit to reveal to us the doctrine of predestination for this reason: to give us a strong basis for being Christians. Why did God choose us to be his children? Why did we put our trust in the Saviour, the Lord Jesus? The answer is in these words – **to become conformed to the image of his Son**. Here is the purpose of predestination – that we should be conformed to the image of his Son. To be conformed to Jesus' image is why he chose us in his saving plan and purpose.

Conformed to the image of his Son – not conformed to a sinful world from which we have been delivered, but conformed to the image of His Son – to be like Christ. This word **conformed** is found later in Romans 12:1-2, the only other time Paul uses it – **I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, (he says) to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** 'Do not be conformed' – do not let the standards of the world be the standards for your new life in Christ: the ways of the world your ways; the afflictions of the world your afflictions; the guilt of the world your guilt; the bondage of the world your bondage.' We are free from all of that. We are free to be what God has purposed for us – to be conformed to the image of his Son.

What, then, is the image of God's Son?

What does it mean to be conformed to the image of God's Son?

First of all, it refers to what God is doing now, and what he will do for us in the future. What is that? He is changing us. We hardly notice it, but it is true. Every day, we become a little different from what we were the day before. This is what God is doing in us at the present moment. When we put our trust in Christ, we began to change; and we go on changing day by day. That is the mark of a true child of God, taking after his nature, just like children take after their fathers. If we are God's children, then we will become more and more like his Son. God is changing us more and more into his image. Philippians 3:20-21 speaks of a complete change of direction for the believer – **Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus**. Now, what is going to happen when Jesus comes again? We eagerly wait for him; we expect him to come. When he comes again, he **will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself**. In that day, we will receive a perfect and glorious body. God has promised it; he has confirmed it. He showed it in works of power during the earthly ministry of Christ. If God, in Christ, did that while in the days of his flesh, what will he do in his exalted state, in his glory, when he comes again? He will transform and change our bodies and give us a perfect one. **We shall all be changed** (1 Corinthians 15:51). Here is the glorious hope, the final change that will take place in that day. We are being changed from one degree of glory into another. And when Christ comes again, we shall be like him. That is what God is doing, changing our behaviour, changing our way of thinking, changing our hearts, and, at the end changing even our bodies into perfect ones. John declares – **Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.** (1 John 3:2)

And what is Christ doing all the while? Changing us, so that we may be like him. And what is he like? Hebrews 1:3 tells us that he is the **express image** of God's person. Being conformed to the image of God's Son, we shall be seen as the true children of God. We shall be perfect at last.

Here, then, are the two key words – **foreknew** and **conformed**, and particularly **predestined** to be conformed. We know this: that it is the purpose of God in all the events of our lives, whether good or bad, to make us more and more like Christ. We may not be great theologians, nor necessarily good Bible students, but we do have a strong desire to be like Christ. It is a simple gospel faith, but a very profound one, and it comes through trusting God and his saving purposes.

Glory all the way!

When we consider the steps of the Christian life, we begin with Christ's call to follow him. There are a number of further steps, all of them of God's making, and all initiated by him. Whom does he call? Verses 29-30 declares, those whom he foreknew, those whom he predestined, those whom he justified, and finally, the most amazing step of all, what theologians call 'glorification' – **and whom He justified, these he also glorified.** (30) To be 'glorified' is a strange word to use for sinners, is it not? Is it something we have to wait for, something that cannot possibly occur in this life because it is not true to our Christian experience? We do not feel glorified. But we must thank God that what we are does not depend on what we feel. It all depends on what God does for us and in us.

Now, in the Christian life, we do not often easily recognise what God has done for us and in us. Yet what he has done for us is glorious. It is for our benefit, and reflects something of the greatness and glory of our God. He created the world so that the flowers grow, the trees put forth their leaves, and the harvest is reaped. He is always faithful in what he does. It is not difficult here to acknowledge that God does these wonderful things. (See Genesis 8:22) But, even more wonderful than that is the fact that God has brought into the new creation as new creatures in Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17) The sheer wonder of what Christ had done for Paul, in saving him, never left him, giving him the determination to serve him throughout a lifetime of battles and hardships. How marvellous, how wonderful, that God's love should ever be set on us, and that we should be called children of God! This is the glory of it. This is not what the world would count as glory; but, from God's point of view, it is glorious. And, praise God, we can be involved in that glory, giving thanks to God for what he is doing in and for and through us.

What does it mean to be glorified?

Christians are predestined – called – justified – glorified: 4 steps of an ascending staircase in Christian growth and experience, with glory at the top. And the wonder of it all is that it is as if it has already happened – ... **he glorified.** What, then, does it mean to be glorified? Well, it is not what the world acknowledges as glory. The world sees things the wrong way round. Its vision is the direct opposite to the truth.

The Roman emperors in all their glory were forced to acknowledge that, despite the fact that millions of people around the world bowed down and worshipped them as living gods, despite the fact that they were probably the richest men in the world, lacking nothing, and boasting in the pomp and circumstance of ceremonies and the display of their riches and power. All was for nothing. In order to make the Roman Emperors more humble, some bearers would go before them in every ceremony, walking down the street in front of the procession carrying smoking flax (reeds). While the smoke was ascending, these men would intone these words: 'Sic transit gloria mundi', which, being translated from the Latin,

means, 'Thus the glory of the world passes away.' The glory of the imperial world was passing away. It was nothing. Thomas A Kempis (1380-1471) quotes this Latin saying in his classic book, IN IMITATION OF CHRIST, contrasting the passing glory of the world with the glory that is in Christ

There is no glory in ourselves. Indeed, Paul goes out of his way in Romans 3:23 to indicate exactly that **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**. By the time we get to chapter 7, we are in a very humble state of mind. But, praise God! When we come to the end of ourselves, we find God. When we come to the end of our own endeavours and our own feeble works, we find the grace of God and the love of God and the mercy of God and the forgiveness of God and the salvation of God in Christ. Just as the moon reflects the glory of the sun, so the children of God reflect the glory of Christ, as we see in chapter 8. We are bound to reflect our heavenly nature. We have no glory in ourselves, but we reflect the glory of God in what he is doing in our lives.

(1) The glory of God is in doing his will

Consider the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to do the Father's will, as he reminded his disciples on many occasions. In John 17:4, he actually uses the word glory. He said, **I have glorified you on the earth**. How did Christ glorify the Father? By having **finished the work which you have given me to do**. Christ glorified God by doing the will of God, although it was at great cost. You will remember when he was there in the Garden of Gethsemane, in great agony of soul, he cried out, **...nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will**. (Matthew 26:39) It was painful, it was difficult, and in the end it brought about his death. But that was all part of God's purposes, and he did it to 'glorify' God. In what he did, the glory of God was reflected. In a criminal's place of execution, God's glory was reflected, as Jesus died on the cross for sinners.

Consider also John 17:24 – **Father, I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me; for you loved me before the foundation of the world**. When Christ was hanging on the cross, the Father glorified him as he fulfilled perfectly what no man had ever been able to do – perfectly fulfil God's will without sin. Here, he says in effect, 'All those for whom I died on the cross, I want them to share my glory. I want them to be with me that they may share in my glory.' If we look a little earlier in John 12:23, we read that Jesus said – **The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified**. Which hour was that? It was not the hour in which he sat on a donkey and walked in triumph, like a Jewish king, into the capital city of Jerusalem, coming to his own place and to his own throne? That had come and gone. It says in the next verse – **Most assuredly, I say to you, unless an ear of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit**. Here he refers to his death on the cross. That was his hour of glory. And we, the fruit of the cross, are his glory. As he died on the cross, he was thinking of the uncountable number, through the centuries to come, who would be his fruit. They would be his glory and they would share his glory with them. And it is the glory of a new covenant. It was John who exclaimed – **... we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth**. (John 1:14)

You will remember that John was the only one of the apostles who was at the Cross. When John looked up, he saw the truth of the Cross – **we beheld His glory**. Here was brought in the new covenant, the perfect way of making sinners right with God: the will of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ his Son.

(2) The glory of God is revealed by his presence

We remember how Moses went up into a mountain, and there he communed with God, and knew the presence of God. Something of the glory of God impressed itself on him. Now, Moses was with the Lord, as it were, face-to-face, and something of the glory and majesty of God penetrated Moses' life. So much so that, when he came down from that mountain. **the skin of his face shone.** (Exodus 34:29) Here is Moses, come from the very presence of God, having spent time with God, reflecting the glory of God in his life. As we spend time with our God, as we commune with our God, as we pray to our God, as we meditate on his Word, and as our lives are lived for the Lord Jesus Christ, we too will reflect his glory. It is inevitable. That is the truth of it, and people will take note of it. We may not notice it ourselves but we may take note of what God is doing in us.

Paul writes about this incident in 2 Corinthians 3:12-13, when Moses face shone so brightly with God's glory that people could not bear it, and asked him to put a veil over his face – **Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech – unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.** In the case of Moses, over a period of time this effect lessened, until the time came when he no longer needed a veil. But we have a glory that stays with us as long as we follow Jesus Christ. We are being glorified. We are not like Moses where the glory dissipated. We have a glory that grows in intensity. In the next chapter, Paul declared – **For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.** (2 Corinthians 4:6) There is the source of our glory. Christ is the one who has shone in our hearts, giving us knowledge of the glory of God.

Paul saw it in the face of Stephen who died a martyr's death in the stoning pit outside Jerusalem. **The council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.** (Acts 6:15). As he lay dying, **Stephen being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God!** (7:55) Stephen was going to share in the same glory as Jesus Christ. It already shone his face. This is what Jesus is doing with us; sharing his glory with us. Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 4:7 – **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power of God may be of God and not of us.** Then he adds, **We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.** (8-10) And that is glory in our lives!

(3) The glory of God is seen in his triumph

Habakkuk 2:14 is a most encouraging verse – **For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.** That is happening now. Here is God's world, a world in which God is actively at work. Here is world where the knowledge of the glory of God is spreading through every continent, every tribe, every people and every nation. What an encouragement to every gospel preacher! There are those whom God is calling out for himself, justifying, and conforming to the glorious image of his Son. That glory is spreading throughout the whole earth. Never have so many people heard the gospel as today. Never has radio reached so many people as today. Never have so many people read the gospel as today. So many doors are open, so many hearts are open, thus many seek the Lord. And the knowledge of the glory of the Lord is being shed abroad everywhere where there are Christian people reflecting the glory of God in their lives.

When will be the greatest declaration of God's glory? Surely when we die and go to be with Jesus Christ. The world does not like to talk about death? But for the Christian, death is the most glorious aspect of his faith. Paul declared – **For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** (Philippians 1:21) There is the glory also.

THE GLORY SONG

When all my labours and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
Will through the ages be glory for me.

When by the gift of his infinite grace
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there, and to look on his face,
Will through the ages be glory for me.

Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet, just a smile from my Saviour, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me.

Chorus:

Oh, that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me,
When by his grace, I shall look on his face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.

Charles Hutchison Gabriel (1856-1932)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 33

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Psalm 71:5

1. Do we know who wrote these wonderful words?
2. Which word is used in connection with the LORD GOD here?
3. What deliverance did the Psalmist expect by trusting in God? (See verse 4)

Read Psalm 40:4

4. Which two groups of people did David not trust?
5. What did David receive from God for trusting him?

Read Ephesians 1:4-6

6. When did God choose those who would believe in Christ?
7. What is the purpose of that choice by God? (See the end of verse 4)
8. What is the purpose of predestination?
9. What is the basis for our acceptance in the Beloved?

Read Ephesians 2:8-9

10. What is the only basis of salvation?
11. What is not acceptable as the basis of salvation?

Read Deuteronomy 7:7

12. What basis for the choosing of the nation of Israel did God reject?
13. Why did God choose Israel, then?

Read Romans 12:1-2

14. What did Paul regard as 'reasonable service' to God?
15. What does 'conformed to this world' mean?
16. What needs to be transformed?
17. What becomes of supreme importance to a Christian?

Read Philippians 3:20-21

18. Why do Christians look onward to heaven?
19. What will Christ do for believers?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

20. Who will be changed?
21. When?
22. How quickly will this change occur?
23. What will be changed?

Read 1 John 3:2

24. What will Christians eventually look like?
25. When will this happen?

Read Hebrews 1:3

26. In whose image is Jesus Christ?
27. Does he have any glory in himself?

Read Genesis 8:22

28. What disaster had just taken place?
29. What did God promise in verse 21?
30. What promise do you find in verse 22?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

31. What promise is made here concerning every Christian?

Read John 17:4, 24

32. How did Christ glorify the Father?
33. Why did Jesus want his followers to see him in heaven?

Read Matthew 26:39

34. To what did Jesus submit in order to bring glory to his Father?

Read John 12:23-24

35. What 'hour' is Jesus referring to here?
36. Why was this 'hour' glorious? (See verse 24)

Read John 1:14

37. Who was the Word?
38. What was his glory?

Read Exodus 34:29

39. What had God just given to Moses?
40. What was unusual about Moses' appearance?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-13

41. Why was Paul not like Moses?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6-10

42. Where can the glory of God still be seen?
43. Where does God now keep his glory?
44. What 4 things were said about Paul, who experienced God's glory?

Read Acts 6:15; 7:55

45. How did Stephen appear at his trial?
46. What two things did Stephen see in heaven?

Read Habakkuk 2:14

47. What great fact is prophesied here?

Read Philippians 1:21

48. What was Paul's great aim in life?
49. What did he think was gain?
50. Which did Paul regard as better – life or death? (See verse 23)

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (a) In your own words, write an explanation for each of these 5 terms:
 - (1) 'Foreknow'
 - (2) 'Predestined'
 - (3) 'Called'
 - (4) 'Justified'
 - (5) 'Glorified'
- (b) Provide at least 2 other references from the Bible for the 5 terms given in (a).
- (c) Read the words of **THE GLORY SONG** again at the end of the Exposition. In no more than 200 words, explain what Charles Gabriel is inviting us to express concerning our faith in this song.

C. PRACTICAL

Read the exposition of the sermon in this study to the leaders of your church, and explain to them that you are required to write a report on the following:

- (1) On their immediate reaction, and comments on what they heard.
- (2) What picture of God they found in Romans 8:29-30.
- (3) What in the sermon encouraged them to continue in their Christian life and experience.
- (4) In the sermon, what did they learn about heaven?

STUDY 34

IF GOD IS ON OUR SIDE, WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY?

ROMANS 8: 31-34

EXPOSITION

Verses 31-39 are what Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls the final sub-section, a little section in its own right arising out of what has gone before. He remarks – **I use the term sub-section deliberately because, as we have seen repeatedly from the beginning of the chapter, it really has but one message. The Apostle states this message in a number of sub-sections all of which are linked together ... In doing so he also winds up and puts in different form the argument contained in verses 28, 29, and 30.**

That leaves us, then, with this small section in 8:31-39, which, in its turn, depends very largely on the chapters that go before. These in their turn look back to one verse: in chapter 1. What Paul does in this section is to return to his first stated theme in 1:16, where, after declaring his longing to come to the Church in Rome to share the gospel with them, he declares – **I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.** The key word in verse 16 is the word **salvation**, and all that it implies.

As we continued our studies in Romans chapters 1-8, we considered various aspects of what salvation really is. This is vital if we are to preach the gospel of salvation clearly. This sub-section provides us with the greatest explanation of salvation than anywhere else in the New Testament, although it is made clear elsewhere. Here, finally, Paul gives us a grand sweep of the doctrines of salvation. Sometimes he is like an eagle looking down upon a larger view; other times he is like a miner digging down into the earth and looking at things closer up.

At the end of chapter 8, under the theme of salvation, Paul answers the question, ‘What has God done for us? In chapter 1 he described it as the power of God. In what form, in what way, has God exercised his power to us personally? The saving of us is the greatest miracle of all, is it not? And what does this salvation mean for us in practical terms? It means that we may depend on God in all the things that worry us in life, particularly the bad things. All sorts of religions and cults promise that if we follow their teachings, our lives will be quite smooth, and we will be able to cope with life. All cults and religion are defective, and never produce what they offer. But Christ does. The test of whether the promises of God are good and true is this: do they work when circumstances are rough?

And the answer is, ‘Yes!’ Paul made it clear 8:28 that **We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.** So there is the answer to the problems. We are not expected, when we become Christians, to keep it up. It is God who keeps us by his power. (1 Peter 1:5) God sustains us in his love, and cares for us. Whatever happens, however difficult life becomes, it is all for our benefit, and God will help us through. Then we

asked the question, 'Why good to me Lord?' To which the reply is, 'Because it was his purpose to choose you – ... **to those who are the called according to his purpose.**

This calling brings out five characteristics of a Christian: his being foreknown by God, his being predestined by God, his being conformed to Jesus Christ, his justification, and his glorification. All these truths belong to the gospel. They are parts of the gospel. When they are all put together, we are lost in admiration at the wonder of our salvation.

Seven questions and answers

In verse 31, Paul pauses, and asks this question – **What then shall we say to these things?** Like most of us who are preachers, he does not expect an answer, for it is a rhetorical question to which he supplies the answer. Paul asks this question six times in Romans (3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14, 30).

What then shall we say? To answer this question, he then goes on to add a further seven questions in all. Here, then, are the seven questions.

(1) The first question we have already noted in verse 31 – **What then shall we say to these things?** This rather hangs in the air. 'What things?', we may ask. Well, they are the things that Paul has been referring to in the previous verses about God's will and purposes, and being able to overcome in adverse and difficult circumstances, knowing that God is working out his good purpose in our lives, and has chosen us to do some amazing things for us.

(2) Another question falls alongside the previous question. It is a provocative teaching method to answer a question by asking another question. It is a good method, for it makes a person think. So Paul goes on immediately in verse 31 to ask, **If God is for us, who can be against us?**

(3) We find question number three at the end of verse 32 – **how shall he (God) not with him (Christ) also freely give us all things?** The **all things** obviously refers back to the 'all things' of verse 28. They are things that come from God, not from anyone else. They come through Christ. You cannot describe them as having a good purpose unless they are given through Christ. Only God can predestine, call, justify and glorify. Jesus Christ turns them to our good. So, **shall he not also with Christ freely give us all things?**

(4) The fourth question is found in verse 33 – **Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?** Who can find a fault in us when God has justified us? Martin Luther writes, 'Who can accuse us whom God has predestined? Absolutely no one! For it is God who justifies us, that is, who declares us to be righteous and so intercedes for us. So also no one can condemn us, for Christ is our Mediator'.

(5) The fifth question in verse 34 is a companion question – **Who is he who condemns?** It is like when the law officer or policeman puts his hand on our arm and says, 'You come with me; you are under arrest.' We might reply, 'What is the charge, officer?', and the charge is read out. But that is not the trial. At the trial, all the evidence is presented, and then comes the sentence. If found guilty, then comes the condemnation. There is a difference between being charged and being condemned. So, we have this similar fifth question – **Who shall condemn us?** Obviously, the answer to both questions is: 'No one.' For, **If God is for us, who can be against us?**

(6) Question six is a very important one for Christians who are in a turmoil over lack of assurance; when they wonder, because they feel that they are not very good Christians,

whether God will throw them off. We read in verse 35 – **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Who can cut us off from the love of Christ? Is there something that can do that? Then, in answer to that question, Paul asks another question which is the answer to the previous one.

(7) The seventh question, in verse 35, is this – **Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?** That is, ‘Can I keep going when it gets tough?’ If we are Christians, how can we face up to these things? The answer is that, with God’s help, **in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

Here, then, are the seven questions of Paul in verses 31-35. They are important questions, ones that we all need to face if we are going to find stability in the Christian life. When we know the answers, we can put them into practice in our lives.

The recovery of faith

One thing more needs to be said here. Paul found his salvation amazing. Well, who would not be if you struck by a blazing light on the road to Damascus, and a great voice asks, in Hebrew, ‘Why are you persecuting me?’ And, ‘I will make you a great apostle to the people you hate most in the world.’ (Acts 26:14-17) We may suppose that the tremendous change in his life, and the thrill of it all, never left Paul all his life. For the lesser mortals that we are, just down-to-earth, ordinary sort of Christians, there are times when we may lose, as David did, the joy of our salvation. (Psalm 51:12) The enthusiasm dampens a little. We begin to take things too much for granted. What can be done about that? Well, the answer is to recover the freshness of it from time to time; and God intends that we should.

The way that Paul does it is to challenge these Roman Christians to think about what God has done for them, and they are bound to become thrilled with it. So that is really the purpose of Paul asking all these questions: to recover the fervency of the Roman hearts by faith in Jesus Christ, and to challenge their love for him.

It was not easy to be a Christian in Rome. This was the time Nero put the blame on the Christians for calamities in Rome, and when they were being shamefully treated. They never knew when the soldiers would come and take them away, and put them in prison or worse. In all, they were hard days. Quoting from Psalm 44:22, Paul remarks in verse 36 – **For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.** Just as animals on the farm do not know when they will be taken off to the slaughterhouse, so the Christians in Rome did not know when they might be arrested, and possibly be dead in a few hours. They lived in hard days. They had to **endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ** (2 Timothy 2:3), but they also needed to enjoy their Christian life. Yes, there was a time for fighting, but there was also a time for enjoyment. Paul’s questions indicate that their Christian lives might be hard and difficult, but they should enjoy their faith. They should rejoice in God’s love and in Christ’s grace. He says in effect, ‘This is your salvation; enjoy it!’

What then shall we say?

Finally. Let us consider four occasions when Paul asked the question – **What shall we say?** In chapter 3:19, Paul declares that the mark of a convicted sinner is the fact he has nothing to say in his defence – **that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.** That is correct. A condemned prisoner is not permitted to speak in his own defence. We notice how quiet the court becomes when the sentence is brought in. But the time comes, says Paul, when the sinner, whom God is about to save, when he comes

before God, will also close his mouth. The next word is spoken by God, which is a saving command such as those of Christ – ‘Be well’, ‘Get up’, ‘Come unto me’, and so on. But the sinner has nothing to say.

What then shall we say to these things? We are brought to the point when we stop asserting ourselves and ask God for his mercy.

(1) But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? (3:5). Here were Jews who would not close their mouths. The Jews were forever justifying themselves. Paul asks them this question – **What advantage then has the Jew?** (3:1) Paul has declared that justification is by faith in Jesus Christ. To this, the Jews objected; for, they might well ask, any Gentile, any filthy pagan could come and receive Jesus as Saviour, so what was the point of being a Jew? What was the point of having such a long history of the Law and sacrifices and the priesthood? What advantage was there in being a Jew? In verse 5, they are reported as saying, ‘You regard us as sinners like the Gentiles, and that through our sin we rejected Jesus Christ and crucified him. Nevertheless, you are saying that because we rejected Christ, he is offered to the Gentiles. Isn’t that a good thing? If our unrighteousness, our rejection of Christ, demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say?’ Such an interesting question! **What shall we say?** ‘We are lost for words’, they say. The fact is that God did set aside Israel. There was now no advantage in being a Jew. The blessings that came to the Jewish nation before Jesus Christ have now gone to the Christian church which is mainly Gentile. God has now set Israel aside without any special status or advantage. So, **What shall we say?**

Well, again Paul finds it difficult to answer that question except to say, **Is God unjust who inflict wrath?** He leaves it to God to judge them, just as he judges the world (6). That is his only answer to their question. It is not a full one, but it is effective.

(2) In 4:1, we find not the Jewish objectors asking a question, but Paul himself – **What then shall we say that Abraham, our father according to the flesh, has found?** He now addresses in this final answer these Jewish objectors, and says to them, ‘You claim to be descendants of Abraham. Remember how God gave Abraham and Sarah a child of the promise, when they were beyond child-bearing age; and how God promised that they would become a nation like the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5-6) – that is, uncountable. In that chapter we read that the only thing God required of Abraham in response was simple faith – **And he believed in the LORD, and he accounted it to him as righteousness.** This was the way God made Abraham right with himself – faith was the only means. Of course, faith was not a work deserving a reward. It was something that was given to him by God, and Abraham exercised it.

In summary, then, what did Abraham actually discover? Surely it was that he should believe in God, and that God alone could make him righteous. As gospel preachers, we say the same to our congregation today: ‘Look, all you must do is to believe in Jesus Christ.’ That is an echo straight out of Genesis 15. And it is the same truth. ‘Put your trust and faith in God. Receive all that God offers you. Believe his promises, and he will make you a child of God. Believe, and exercise saving faith.’ It is a simple response, which even a little child can manage. Sinners feel that they need to know it all before they commit themselves, yet all that is required such a prayer as: ‘Lord Jesus, forgive me my sin. I do believe in you. Make me a child of God.’ At that point, and with such an honest and sincere prayer, he is transformed from one who is destined for hell to one who has glory in his heart and is destined for heaven.

The Philippian jailer was so terrified that he was prepared to take his own life in the middle of an earthquake. He asked, **What must I do to be saved?** Paul replied simply, **Believe**

on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. (Acts 16:30-31) That is all that was needed. Nothing else was required. So, what did Abraham our father according to the flesh find? All he did was believe the Lord – **And Abraham believed the Lord, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.** It was given him as a free gift; it came by grace.

(3) The third occasion we find the question asked is in chapter 7:7. If Abraham had to be saved only by faith, why did the Lord bring in the Law through Moses? Why did God command Israel to give all their heart and strength to obeying the Law of Moses? Paul wrote, **What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? Certainly not!** You see, Israel tried hard many centuries to keep the Law of God, and failed miserably. This they became swamped more and more in their sin and guilt. Now, if Abraham was saved by faith, why did God prompt Moses, some hundreds of years later, to bring in the Law? The further question, **Is the Law sin?** indicates the function of the Law to convince sinners of their sin. The Law, of itself cannot therefore be thought sinful. It was a hateful idea to Paul, who exclaimed, **Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the Law.** That is why God set the Law before Israel. Not to measure men's failure like a metre rule, but to make them flee from its terrible perfection, and run away to Jesus Christ. The Law tells sinners what they deserve, but Christ provides what they do not deserve – mercy and grace.

Verse 12 continues. **Therefore the Law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.** It is important for those to whom we preach the gospel to come to a knowledge of their sins. Therefore we must first preach the Law to them. If they do not know what sin is, how can they ask God to forgive them their sin? The only way to know what sin is, is to know the Law of God. So, says Paul, **What shall we say then?** Why, then, has God set aside the old covenant of sacrifices provided for under the Law? Why has he finished with it? Paul teaches that the impossibility of keeping the Law drives us to Christ; away from works to grace.

(4) Finally, we come to 8:31- **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?** The way to God by keeping the Law is impossible, for God looks into our hearts and sees our sins. We stand condemned. What is the way out? Paul replies with another question – **Who is he who condemns. It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen?** (34) For those who are in Christ, all their sins are taken away. Thus, **if God is for us, who can be against you?** When the devil comes to tempt believers into despair, and asks, 'What sort of Christian are you? Look at your sins. You belong to me, not to Christ', we are able to reply, 'Ah, **but God is for us.**' God has made provision for that. Christ died on the Cross for our sin, and we are free of condemnation.'

Furthermore, when circumstances in life arise causing us grief and suffering, and making us feel depressed and frustrated, we are still able to say, **If God is for us, who can be against us?** We may assure our hearers that such a faith in God is more than adequate for **these things.** Indeed, we have this promise from God – **Shall he not with him (Christ) freely give us all things.** It is the delight of the Christian life that all difficult things are successfully dealt with by thinking in the first place of Jesus Christ, and then of what he has done for us.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 34

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Romans 1:15-16

1. Where did Paul particularly want to preach the gospel?
2. What was special about this city?

3. With whom did Paul wish to match the power of God to salvation?

Read 1 Peter 1:5

4. What had God done for these believers?
5. How are believers kept in their faith?

Read Acts 26:14-17

6. Who accused Paul of persecuting Christians?
7. What was Paul called to do?
8. To whom was he sent?

Read Psalm 51:12

9. What bad thing had disturbed David's faith?
(See the introduction to the Psalm)
10. What did his salvation bring to David?
11. What kept David secure spiritually?

Read Psalm 44:22

12. What did God do to Israel when she turned away from him?
(See verses 10-11)
13. What 2 things did the believers in Israel not do? (See verse 20)
14. God knew their faithfulness. (See verse 21) What do you think the phrase 'killed all day long' means in verse 22?

Read 2 Timothy 2:3

15. How could Timothy remain strong in the ministry? (See verse 1)
16. What should Timothy do about his hardships as a 'good soldier of Jesus Christ'?

Read Genesis 15:5-6

17. Who was promised numerous descendants? (See verse 1)
18. What was the result of him believing in the Lord?

Read Acts 16:30-31

19. What external circumstances brought the jailer to ask his question?
20. Who are the 'they' who answered his question?
21. What alone is needed in order to be saved?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

Write out as many similarities as you can find in verses 31-39, and in the previous verses (28-30)

C. PRACTICAL

Write a sermon based on Romans 8:28-39, which is designed to help Christians suffering in a time of persecution.

- (1) Give the sermon an original title.
- (2) Provide an introduction and a conclusion.
- (3) As an illustration, write of at least one instance of someone you know, or have read about, who has persevered during a time of persecution.

STUDY 35

THE LOVE OF GOD

ROMANS 8: 35-39

EXPOSITION

If anyone should say to me, 'This is the last occasion you will ever preach. What will you choose for your text?' I believe my answer would be 'Romans 8:38-39' – **For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Indeed, could a preacher ever find a greater text? Is there any theme higher than that declared here – the love of God? Here is a word that occurs 124 times in the Old Testament and 156 times in the New Testament: 280 in all. (A recent version of the Bible lists 505 occasions).

The love of God is the greatest reality in the Christian life? It lies behind six great themes in Romans 8. If we return to verse 1, we have there the basis of our security. So many Christians feel insecure, particularly young Christians whose faith is new. They are not quite sure; they are rather tentative; they do not like to commit themselves too much in case they do something wrong, or say something wrong. As far as the Christian life is concerned, the love of God, and the results from this overwhelming love are experiences they have never had before, and do not know exactly what to make of them. Then having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, they begin to be assaulted with many doubts. Difficulties and problems arise, and they continue to sin. The result is the temptation to doubt their salvation, and the basis of their salvation.

(1) No condemnation and God's love

To combat this, and to encourage us as Christians not to base our assurance upon our feelings, Paul reminds us that our salvation is apart from us, and is simply God's work. Paul reminds us (in verse 1) that although we condemn ourselves, although we feel guilty for our sins, although we do not have and spiritual peace from our sincere good works, we look to the eternal salvation of God. Instead of looking at ourselves through the eyes of our own feeling and understanding, we should consider ourselves from God's point of view.

That may be a new and interesting approach to those to whom we preach the gospel. To try and imagine what we are like through God's eyes. It is not how we feel God thinks about us, but how God actually sees us. How can we know how God sees us? Well, we can depend on what God has told us. God has told us clearly in his Word what he thinks of us. If we are his adopted children through faith in his Son Jesus Christ, God says to us, 'I will never condemn you'. **There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.** These are not the words of an indulgent father, quick to overlook and excuse our faults, but those of God whose Son came to take our sins, our blame, and our guilt, upon himself. By trusting in him, and by committing ourselves to Jesus, we are set free from these things. God sees us (wonder of wonders!) as not worthy of condemnation. He sees nothing wrong in us.

That is most extraordinary; yet it is at the very heart of the gospel, and it sets us free. Our security is in the promises of God in Jesus Christ, and here is a great one! We condemn ourselves because we remember our past sins, and feel guilty over them. That is natural; but we must not give way to our feelings. Let us say, 'Well, if God has said, **No condemnation**, then it must be true. If God loves me to that extent, then he loves me whether I am a good, bad or indifferent Christian, and despite my feelings.' **No condemnation** – what great security there is here.

(2) Being set free and God's love

Let us consider our liberation in verses 2-5 – **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.** The old slavish fear to the Law in the old life disappeared when turned to Jesus Christ. All the old habits, all the old failures, all the old guilt, range against us, and point their fingers of accusation at us, saying, 'You did these things, and you do them still.' Instead, we are set free from their guilt because we now belong to Christ. The price was paid for every wrongdoing. They are all cancelled out – **and you ... he has made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.** (Colossians 2:13-14) The horror of his sacrificial death on the cross is seen in a totally different light as we consider these words – **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God** (1 Peter 3:18). He paid the price for our sins. We find it difficult to be released from the guilt of them. We find it difficult to look Christ in the face and acknowledge him as our Saviour. But we have been accepted by him, and he has set us free. Sin can no longer make any claim on us. The old life is done away with; it is dead. It was paid for; it is nailed to the Cross.

This was accomplished in the love of God and through the love of Christ. The accusations of our conscience are stifled and stopped. They fall away because Jesus has borne our sins. That is what Paul is saying here – **You are set free from the law of sin and death.** We cannot be saved by attempting to keep God's Law. The Law brings the severe condemnation of God to us. Good works bring not salvation, but what we deserve: guilt and failure and estrangement from God. But in Christ, we are delivered from this, and, instead, we look to the work of Christ on the cross, which did please God, and base our eternal hope on that – the supreme mark of God's love. Here we reach the heart of the gospel, and it brings us freedom – **God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:8) We are set free from the old life, with all its guilt and failure. We may now look with boldness to God and exclaim and declare, 'Abba Father!' (8:15)

What are the implications of being set free? Well, we are set free to develop our relationship with God. Once, we were far from God, and our relationship was an intimate and personal one with the Devil, with the forces of evil, with the depraved aspects of our nature. We lived with it; we came to terms with it; we hated it. But there was nothing we could do about it. Now that we have been set free by Christ, we can now know God. Consider verse 6 – **For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.** The worldly man, the man still living in his sin, living in hopes of his good works – so called, living in his guilt and failure, is terrified of dying. The mind set on the flesh is dead. But the position of the Christian is the opposite to that. His mind set on the Spirit brings life and peace. We become settled in our lives, whatever may come, whenever our life comes to an end; settled, not because we make a greater effort, but because our minds are set on God, and a God of love. Our minds become full of God, where we put God first, and at the centre of our interests.

This brings life and peace. And what a relationship results! This resurrection is miraculous to every one of us. All Christians have become the object of God's miraculous activity, miracles of love and grace, when God does the impossible, and brings life out of death. Once we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and now he has made us alive in Christ.

We were indeed raised from the dead – **But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.** (11) There is a resurrection to eternal life in our bodies. We have a hope for the future. But at the present time we are raised from spiritual death. We are alive in the risen Christ who dwells in us. We live a resurrected life in the world. Christ dwells in us; and what he does in us, declares to the world that he is alive. He says, 'My resurrection power is proved in a change of life. I set him free. Once he was bound by sin, but now he is liberated through me, the risen Christ.'

(3) The sons of God in love

See how we live now, with hidden and secret resources that he gives us. We could never live in our own strength. We live our lives with spiritual authority and status – **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.** (14) If we have the Spirit in us, if we have the life of the resurrected Christ in us, then we have the right to declare ourselves children of God. (John 1:12-13) The world is astonished at our daring. We dare because we have no doubt that we are the sons of God, because that is what we are by the grace of God.

The way we live our lives is proof of God's nature indwelling us. We are adopted into God's holy family – **For we did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear** (15). The life of the unsaved is full of fear, 'but', says the Psalmist, **I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.** (Psalm 34:4) The unspiritual man is full of fears; the Christian son of God is delivered from his fears. We **received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.** (15) We have been adopted into God's family, taken into God's loving care. Our adoption papers are safe and secure in the bank vault in heaven, from where the devil cannot steal them and destroy them. God holds the title deeds to our adoption, and no one can take them away from him. **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.** (16) In love, God's Spirit whispers in our hearts, 'You are my children. Come.'

(4) Heirs of God in love

Finally, the basis of our assurance is found in verse 17 – **and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.** The heir comes into a glorious fortune. The Psalmist declared of God – **For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.** (Psalm 50:10) His are all things, and he supplies our every need because we are his children, heirs of God.

(5) Our suffering and God's love

Then 18-39 deals with what is a reality in every Christian life: our suffering. Now, if our faith does not survive in times of suffering; it is not worth having. Paul declares – **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us.** (18) Here is Paul anticipating the end! He shows that all the adversity is worth it in the end. There is a loving and good purpose in all our sufferings, our difficulties, and our afflictions.

In the meantime, how important prayer is in the Christian life when we have much to bear, how important to develop a life of prayer! Verses 26-27 indicate that we have help in that respect – **the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now, he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.** Here, we see the Holy Trinity involved in the life of prayer. We cannot pray; we cannot find the words. Our feelings overwhelm us. We do not know what to put it into words. So the Spirit comes to translate our feelings into words as they are brought through the Son to the Father. Is this not a great kindness, and a mark of God's love? So God's help comes to us in our times of prayer.

(6) God's love is ever-present

In verse 37-39, we are reminded that, our present sufferings as Christians, God's love never fails. There is present help, true of every lasting relationship – but within and beyond there is always the love of God. **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?** Certainly not the threat of death, for which Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 – **For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.**

It is also a love that conquers – **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** (37) John Calvin notes, 'There are many testimonies of Scripture which refer to this truth, where the saints, relying on the power of God alone, dare to despise every adversity which they encounter in the world.' Calvin quotes Psalm 23:4; Psalm 56:11; and Psalm 3:6.

The final two verses are devoted entirely to the love of God – **For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(1) First of all, these verses tell us that God's love conquers all. It cannot be resisted. Why was Paul so persuaded, so convinced? His conviction was based on the fact that in the first place the love of God conquered him. Then looking back over his missionary journeys and the effect of his preaching on the countless lives of those heard the gospel and turned to Jesus, he saw the love of God conquering.

We are often conquered by our feelings and by our circumstances, almost to the point of despair. But there is one thing that always does go on conquering – the love of God. **We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.** How can we know the overwhelming victory of Christ in all the things that overwhelm us? 'Well', says Paul, 'in the love of God.' That is how we conquer. How do we know that God's love will help us to conquer, and win through in the end? Because God's love conquered us in the beginning, when we were his enemies! Now, if God's love can conquer us, then surely we ought, with his help, to conquer anything. And that is right.

God chose Israel, not for any special reason, but because he loved Israel. Think of the Ten Commandments, which can be summed up in a few words. Jesus said – **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... and ... you shall love your neighbour as yourself.** (Matthew 22:37-39; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18) How do we do that? Notice that the word **love** occurs twice here. We obey because God loves us and gives us the love in our hearts to fulfil these moral duties. We respond with love because he first loved us; and God's love is overwhelming and invincible.

It is a love that conquers, and we conquer with it. It is a love that never fails.(1 Corinthians 13:8)

(2) Secondly, it is a love that remains – **I am persuaded that neither death nor life ...until** he runs out of things to add; so he sums them all up in the words **any other created thing**. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which remains forever. Nothing can separate us from it. Some circumstances may come along to obscure the love of God, or reduce our feelings for the love of God, when we wonder sometimes if God still loves us; but it is a love that remains. It holds us up; it keeps us going; it is the glory of God and the lifter of our head. (Psalm 2:3), the sparkle in our eye, the new wine in our hearts. The love of God never varies, never increases or declines; it is always the same.

(3) Thirdly, it is a love which comes to us through Jesus Christ, and continues in him – **the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**.

1 Corinthians 13 is unlike any other piece of literature. It is the greatest section in the Bible about love; and it has never been surpassed. Paul wrote – **And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.** (13) 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 provide an inspiring list of some of the characteristics of love. All of them can be found in the life of Jesus Christ. To a man or woman of the world, they are an impossible ideal, but to a Christian they are commonplace, stemming from the love of Christ.

Therefore, if Christ resides in us, then we will have the power and ability to be changed by the height and depth and breadth of God's love in Christ.

At this point in the sermon, we will have the opportunity to call the spiritually lost to come to Jesus Christ. Our words might go something like this:

'Do you know Jesus Christ? Have you experienced his love? Have you believed in him as your Saviour? Do you desire the love of God in Christ like a traveller in the desert longs for the waters of an oasis with an unquenchable thirst? Are you like the flowers that follow the sun when it shines? The love of God is like a sun to us? Do not ignore it! Take it before it disappears! And never let it go! It is there, and it is free. This love is unconditional. It is the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And when you have it, it will work in your life and change you along the lines of the gospel according to Paul in his Letter to the Romans.'

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 35

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Colossians 2:13-14

1. Which two things make us dead to God?
2. Which two things make us alive to God?
3. How are our sins taken away?

Read 1 Peter 3:18

4. What does the phrase '**once for sins**' indicate?
5. Which word here shows that Christ was sinless?

Read John 1:12-13

6. What comes to everyone who believes in Christ?
7. By whose will do we become Christians – ours of God's?

Read Psalm 34:4

8. How does David describe himself as he called to the Lord to help him? (See verse 6)
9. What deliverance did David experience?
10. From what was he saved?

Read Psalm 50:10

11. Which 4 groups of creatures mentioned here belong to God?
12. How does God view the world? (See verse 12)

Read Psalm 23:4

13. What did David not fear?
14. Why did he have no fear?
15. What comforted him?

Read Psalm 56:11

16. What is here that David did not fear?
17. Where did he place his trust?

Read Psalm 3:6

18. What menace was David facing? (See the introduction to the Psalm)
19. How did David survive? (See verse 5)

Read Matthew 22:37-39

20. Christ first referred to a verse in Deuteronomy. Give chapter and verse.
21. The second reference by Christ is from Leviticus. Give chapter and verse.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8

22. What does Paul say about Christian love?
23. 15 characteristics of love are mentioned in verses 4-7. First, state the nine negative ones, then secondly, the six positive ones.

Read Psalm 2:3

24. Who says such things against God? (See also verses 1-2)
25. Who is the Lord's Anointed?

B & C

QUESTIONS ON THE TRANSCRIPT, AND PRACTICAL

- (1) Quote other verses in the Bible, similar to those given by John Calvin in the sermon, which give us encouragement in difficult circumstances.
- (2) Give instances in the life of Christ which illustrate the 15 characteristics of Christian love which you wrote down in your answer to question 23, above.

THE END OF THE FOURTH MODULE OF ROMANS AND THE COURSE

We end our course in Romans with a sermon by John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) – literally meaning, ‘the golden-mouthed’ – once Bishop of Constantinople. He was probably the greatest preacher of the early centuries of the Church; certainly the greatest preaching expositor of the Bible. His love for Paul’s Letter to the Romans was unsurpassed, and he insisted on a continual reading of it.

There are no questions. Just enjoy it, and learn how to be an expository preacher from it.

A SERMON ON ROMANS 8:28-39.

By John Chrysostom

A shorter version in easier English by Geoffrey Stonier

**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,
to those who are the called according to his purpose.**

It seems to me that Paul raises this whole topic for the benefit of those who were in danger; and not just these words alone, but also what he has said previously. Consider his words:

... the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us' (18);

... the whole creation groans (22);

... we were saved in this hope (24);

... we eagerly wait for it with perseverance (25);

... we do not know what we should pray for as we ought' (26).

Verse 28 is addressed to them all. Paul tells them not to pick things they think are useful, but what the Spirit suggests. Things that may appear to be personally profitable might at some time even cause them harm. A quiet life, for instance, and freedom from danger and fear, might seem to be a great blessing. And no wonder they think like that, since the blessed Paul himself thought so? However, later, he came to believe that the opposite of all these things was a great advantage; and when he understood that, he was content. Once he pleaded with the Lord three times to be freed from a hindrance, but God said – **My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** (2 Corinthians 12:8-9) Afterwards, he was pleased to be persecuted and insulted, and he accepted hopeless wrongs done to him. **Therefore,** he said, **I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.** (2 Corinthians 12:10) This was why he wrote, **For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought.** And he exhorted everyone to yield these matters to the Spirit; for he knows us well, and knows what is the will of God for us.

Having cheered them up in these matters, he goes on to write these words, putting forward a strong reason why they should go on – **'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God'**. Now, when he says **'all things'**, he is referring even to things that seem painful. For if tribulation, or poverty, or imprisonment, or famines, or deaths, or anything else at all come upon us, God is able to change all these bad things into good. This shows his unimaginable power, his making things painful to be light to us, turning them into something helpful for us. So he does not say that **'to those who love God'** no grievous affliction will come, but all things will **'work together for good'**. That is to say, he uses grievous things to make those who are suffering approved. And this is a much better than trying to avoid the approach of such grievances, or stopping them when they arrive.

This is what he did at the great furnace of Babylon. He neither prevented the saints falling into it, nor extinguished the flame after they were cast into it; but he let it burn on. And by this flame he made them great objects of wonder. This was true of the

apostles; for he performed many similar wonders continually. (Mark 16:18) Now, if those who have learnt to be philosophical can use the things of nature to do the opposite, and appear even when living in poverty to be in easier circumstances than the rich, and flourish despite the disgrace of it, much more will God work for those who love him through these things, and even in greater things. For only one thing is needed – a genuine love for God; and everything else will follow. Just as things that seem harmful can turn out to be good, so even things profitable can harm those who do not love him. For example, the display of miracles and wisdom in Christ's teaching only harmed the Jews. As for the miracles, they called him demon-possessed (John 8:48). As for the truth of his teaching, they saw him as claiming equality with God (John 4:18); and because of his miracles, they even plotted to kill him. (John 11:47, 53) However, the thief, when nailed to the cross, mocked, and suffering unimaginable pain, not only came to no harm, but even gained the greatest good from it.

See, then, how all things work together for good for those who love God. After mentioning this great blessing – one which far exceeds men's mind, since to many it seems beyond belief, he proves it in these words – **to those who are called according to his purpose**. Now, consider this: the blessing only comes from the calling. So why did he not call all from the beginning? Or, why did he not call Paul earlier? Does it not seem that the deferral was harmful? But it was shown in the end to be for the best. The **purpose** he refers to here, however, is not their calling. For if their calling alone were sufficient, how was it that they were not all saved? Therefore it was not the calling alone, but the purpose of that calling, that brings salvation. For the calling was not forced on them. All were called, but all did not respond to the call.

For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (29)

What a high honour! For what the Only-begotten was by nature, this they will become ours by grace. And still not satisfied with the thought conformed to Christ's image, Paul adds further, **that he might be the first-born**. Even here he does not pause, but goes on, **among many brethren**. He longs that they might see this relationship clearly. Now, all these things were true of Christ's incarnation. In relation to the Godhead, he is the Only-begotten. So see what great things he is to us! Have no doubt, then, about the future. For Paul goes on to state God's concern for us by saying that these things were fore-ordered from the beginning. Men have their interpretation of events as they rise, but to God these things were determined long ago; and, from of old, he bore goodwill toward us.

Moreover whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified. (30)

Now, he justified them after their regeneration. 'Whom he justified, these he also glorified' – a gift, just like our adoption (see 8:15).

What then shall we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (31)

As if he were saying, 'Let me hear nothing more about dangers and deceits from every quarter. For even if some people question the glory of the things to come, still, they

cannot say a word against the good things that have already taken place, as, for instance, the friendship God displayed towards them from the beginning, the justifying, and the glory. Yet these things he gave through means that were distressing. And the things which might be thought a disgrace, such as the cross, scourging, chains, these are what have set the whole world to rights. Consider what Christ himself suffered, though awful in men's eyes, even through this he brought about the deliverance and salvation of the whole race. So also he delights to do in regard to those things that you endure, turning your sufferings unto glory and renown.

If God be for us, who can be against us? It might be asked, 'Who is not against us? Why, the world is against us, both kings and peoples, both relatives and fellow-countrymen! Yet those who are against us, so far from thwarting us, even against their will they become for us the cause of crowns, and the agents of countless blessings! God, in his wisdom, turns their plots into our salvation and glory. Listen; no one is really against us! It was this that gave new lustre to Job, despite the fact that the devil was up in arms against him. For the devil moved his friends against him, his wife against him, and sores, and servants, and a thousand other things. Yet it turned out that none of it was against him at all. In fact, it turned out that it was all for him. Now, since God was for him, even things seemingly against him were for him.

This happened with the apostles also, insofar that both the Jews and the Gentiles, false brethren and rulers and peoples, and famines, and poverty, and ten thousand other things were against them; yet nothing was against them. What made them the brightest and best and greatest in the sight both of God and of men, were just these things. Just reflect, then, that what Paul is saying here about the faithful, and those who are crucified with Christ, not even the Emperor with his diadem can claim. For against him there are a host of armed barbarians, and invading enemies, and bodyguards that plot, and many subjects that are forever rising up and rebelling, and thousands of other things. But against the faithful, who take care to obey God's laws, neither man, nor devil, nor anything else, can stand! For if you take away his money, you bring him a reward. If you speak ill of him, by your very evil report he will gain fresh lustre in God's sight. If you starve him, the more he will glory, and the greater his reward will be. If – and this seems the most severe blow of all – you give him over to death, you put a crown of martyrdom on his head. What, then, is equivalent to this way of life, seeing that nothing can be done against it? Even those who devise mischief are of no less a service to him than benefactors! This is why Paul says, **If God be for us, who can be against us?**

Next, still not satisfied with what he has already said, Paul mentions the greatest sign of God's love for us, and what he is always thinking about. I mean, the slaying of God's Son. For he did not only justify us, and glorify us, and make us conformed to Christ's image, except by not sparing his own Son for us. So he goes on to say:

He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (32)

The words he uses here are high-sounding and exceedingly warm, to show God's love. How, then, would he neglect us, on whose behalf **he spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all?** What goodness not sparing even his own Son, but giving him up for all those worthless and unfeeling enemies and blasphemers. **How**

then shall he not with him also freely give us all things? What he means here is this: 'If he gave his own Son, and not merely gave him, but gave him up to death, why doubt the rest, since you have such a Lord? Why be concerned with the household goods when you have the Master? For he who gave the greater thing to his enemies, can do nothing else but give the lesser to his friends.'

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (33)

Here, he shows his opposition to those who say that faith brings no profit, and will not believe that conversion means a complete change of life. See how quickly Paul stops their mouths by confessing the worthiness of him who elected them. He does not ask, 'Who shall bring a charge against God's servants, or against his faithful ones?' No; he speaks of **God's elect**. And election is a sign of integrity. When a horse-breaker has selected colts he considers fit for the race, no one would think of criticising his judgement, but would be laughed at if he found fault with them. Much more, then, when God selects souls, no one can bring a charge against them. Such deserve nothing but laughter. **It is God who justifies.**

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. (34)

He does not say, it is God who forgave us our sins. But what can be greater – **It is God who justifies.** For when the Judge's sentence declares us righteous (and what a Judge!), what will the accuser say? Neither is it right to fear temptations, for God is for us, and has proved it by what he has done. Nor could the Jews argue, for he has both elected and justified us, and worked that wondrous thing by the death of his Son. Who, then, can condemn us, since God crowns us, and Christ was put to death for us, and was not only put to death, but '**makes intercession for us**'?

It is Christ, he says, who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. For although he now enjoys heavenly honour, he has not stopped caring for us, but **makes intercession for us**, and loves us just the same. For he was not content with being put to death for us, a sign of his very great love, but he also addresses the Father on our behalf. Paul used this human way of speaking of Christ's intercession that he might point out his love. He begins with, **He did not spare his own Son**, then, **who is even at the right hand of God**, and finally, **who also makes intercession for us**. This latter shows an equality of honour and rank with the Father, so we take it that his intercession is not a sign of inferiority, but only of love. For being life itself (Psalm 36:9), and a well of good things of every sort, and having the same power as the Father, both in raising the dead and in bringing them to life, and in doing all else beside, how then can he be a suppliant in order to help us? (John 5:19, 21, 36.) He who, by his own power, set free those who were given up to be condemned, made them righteous, and sons, and showed them the very highest honour, and brought to pass things which had never been hoped for, how should he, after having achieved all this, and having displayed our nature before the King's throne, be required to become a suppliant and intercede for us? (Acts 7:55; Hebrews 10:12; Revelation 7:17)

You see how at every point in the argument there is no other reason for his having mentioned intercession except to point out the warmth and vigour of his love for us. For the Father also is presented as beseeching men to be reconciled to him –

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20.) Still, though God beseeches, and men are ambassadors for Christ, Paul does not mean to undermine the dignity of God, or the intensity of the love. If, then, it is the Spirit who **makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered** (26), and Christ died and intercedes for us, and the Father **spared not His own Son** for us, and elected us, and justified us, why be afraid anymore? Why tremble when we enjoy such a great love, and have such a great interest taken in us? In this way, then, after showing his great providence over us from the first, he then speaks out boldly not to say that we ought to love him, but, as if grown enthusiastic at this remarkable providence concerning us, he says:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (35)

Notice that he does not say **the love of God**; so indifferent is he as to whether he mentions the name of Christ or God. Value the judgement of blessed Paul. He does not mention the things that daily concern us, like the love of money, and desire for fame and glory, and the tyranny of anger, but things that are far more enslaving, powers which take hold of nature itself and stagger us in our determination not to give in to them, such things as tribulation and distress. For even if he does not take long to spell them out, these temptations could be represented by thousands of lines. When he mentions **tribulation**, he means prisons and chains, censure and banishment, and many other hardships. So with one word he runs through an ocean of dangers without measure, and all the evils men meet with. Yet still he dares them all! Therefore, he brings them forward in the shape of questions, as if it was impossible for him so beloved by the Lord to be moved, who enjoys so much providence on his behalf. Then, in case it looked as if he had forgotten himself, he quotes the prophet also, who declared a long while ago:

As it is written: For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (36; Psalm 44:22)

That is, we are exposed to the danger of being treated badly by others. But against so many, and so great, dangers, and recent horrors, the object – **For your sake** – of our suffering is given as sufficient consolation, or rather, more sufficient. For it is not for men, nor for anything in this life, that we suffer, but for the King of the universe. But this is not the only crown, for he encircles it with others beside. Now, men can die many times in a day. This increases the prize many times, so that we will depart with as many crowns as we have lived days, or perhaps even more. For it is possible in a day to die not once or twice, but many times. The one who is always ready for this keeps continually receiving a full reward. This, then, is what the psalmist is hinting at when he says **all day long**. And, for this reason, the apostle also brought this quotation to their notice to stir them up all the more. For if those under the old dispensation, who had the land as their reward, and other things which come to an end with this life, looked down on the present life with its temptations and dangers, what excuse can we find if we deal so badly with the promise of heaven and the Kingdom above, with its unutterable blessings, and not even to come up to the same measure as they? This he left unsaid, but left it to his hearers' consciences, and was satisfied with the quotation alone.

He shows too that their bodies are a sacrifice, and that we must not be disturbed or troubled when God having orders it so. And he exhorts them in other ways as well. To prevent any from saying that he is merely philosophising, and is out of touch with reality, he adds, **we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter**, referring to the daily deaths of the apostles. You see his courage and his goodness here. For as the sheep offer no resistance when slaughtered, so neither do we. But since the mind of man is so feeble, even after such great promises, and is often afraid of many temptations, see how he again rouses the hearer, and gives him a lofty and joyful spirit, by saying:

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
(37)

For what is indeed wonderful is this, not that we are conquerors only, but that we are so by the very things meant as plots against us. And we are not merely conquerors, but we are **more than conquerors**; that is, we are at ease without working hard to get it. For without giving way to these things, and by setting our minds on things above, we raise our trophies against our enemies. And with good reason, for it is God who is on our side. Do not then be subject to doubt. If we are beaten, we get the better of our beaters; if we are driven out, we overcome our persecutors; if we die, we put the living to flight. For when we take the power and love of God into account, there is nothing to prevent these wondrous and strange things from coming to pass, and that victory, the greatest of them all, will shine upon us. For they not only conquered, but did so in a marvellous way, showing that those who plotted against them were at war not against men, but against God's invincible might.

See the Jews, then, with the apostles among them, quite at a loss, asking, **What shall we do to these men?** (Acts 4:16.) For it was marvellous indeed that, though they had hold of them, and brought them to their court, and imprisoned them, and beat them, they were yet at a loss as to what to do, and, in their perplexity, they were overcome by the very things they expected to conquer. Neither kings nor people nor ranks of demons nor the devil himself had the power to get the better of them, but were all taken at a very great disadvantage, finding that all they planned against them went in their favour. Therefore, he says, **we are more than conquerors**. For this was a new rule of victory for men to prevail against their enemies, and in no instance to be overcome, but to go forth to these struggles as if they themselves had the outcome in their own hands.

For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (38-39)

There are some great themes here. But the reason we do not enlarge on them is because our love is so small. Although they are great, as Paul wished to show, they are nothing compared with the love with which he was loved by God. What he says is this – 'Why speak of things present, and evils inherited in this life? For even if someone told me of things to come, and of powers; of things, such as death and life; of powers, such as angels and archangels, and all the superior orders of beings; even these things mean little to me compared with the love of Christ. For even if someone threatened me with future death (which really is no death), and promised me life

without end, provided I separated from Christ, I would not agree to it. Why mention kings and rulers, and this one or that one? For if you tell me of angels, or all the powers above, or all existing things, or all that are to come, they are all too small to me, whether on the earth, or in heaven, or under the earth, or up in heaven, compared with the love of Christ. Then, as though this was not enough to set before them passionately, he refers to a being of like magnitude, and says, **nor any other created thing**. And what he means is this – even if there were any other creature as great as the visible, and as great as the intelligible, none could part me from that love. This he states not as if the angels had attempted it, or other powers; far from it. But he wants to show to the utmost the love he has toward Christ. For Christ's sake, he did not love the things of Christ, but for his sake the things that were his. To him alone he looked; and one thing he feared, and that was falling out of love with him. For that would be more dreadful than hell; and to abide in it was more desirable than a kingdom.

END OF MODULE 4

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