

## Romans 1–8

### John Hepp, Jr.

*This study gives summaries and brief commentaries on Romans 1–8, treating especially chapter 8 with more detail. It is designed to help you follow the apostle Paul’s argument as you read those chapters repeatedly. Some of my views come from Alva J. McClain’s commentary, Romans: the Gospel of God’s Grace (BMH Books: Winona Lake, IN, 1973). Gospel is for the Greek word meaning “good news.” Except in titles distinguish Gospel (a book) from gospel (the message). Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version. All bolding is added. Jesus’ title Christ is usually changed to its equivalent Messiah. Both forms mean “the Anointed One,” that is, the promised King, which Messiah still suggests.*

Section in Romans	Page
Introduction, 1:1–17	2
I. Condemnation, 1:18 to 3:20	4
II. Salvation, 3:21 to 8:39	5
A. Justification, 3:21 to 5:21	6
B. Sanctification, chs. 6–7	6
C. Preservation, ch. 8	8
1. Victory over Sin, 8:1–11	8
2. Victory over Suffering, 8:12–30	9
3. Victory Hymn, 8:31–39	12
 <b>Appendixes</b>	
A: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel	14
B: The Title <i>Son of God</i>	16
C: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?	17

Romans is a great doctrinal treatise embedded in a personal letter. The letter, as is evident at the beginning and end of the book, is from the apostle Paul to the church at Rome. The treatise, beginning at 1:18,<sup>1</sup> is his explanation from God of **how the gospel works**. Paul summarizes the gospel in his introduction. But in the treatise his design is not to teach unbelievers the gospel. Rather, it is to show **believers** how and why the gospel works. When he appeals in Romans to unbelievers, it does not indicate his readers but is a literary device.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:16–17 is transitional from Paul’s introduction to the treatise and could be included in either. In these verses Paul announces the theme for the treatise and quotes its text.

<sup>2</sup> See especially 2:1, 3–5, 17–29, where he appeals to Jews in the second person (“you” and “your”). Being a Jew himself, he sometimes refers to Jews in the first person (“our,” “my,” and “we,” as in 3:5, 7, 9). Most often,

Paul’s design should affect our study and use of Romans. For example, we should not consider it a primer to explain the gospel in evangelism. Of course, many people have been saved by studying Romans. But no one has to understand all, or even much, of Romans to be saved. He does have to respond to the gospel with “the obedience of faith” (1:5).

### Introduction, Romans 1:1–17

Paul begins with a long salutation (1:1–7). This includes a statement of the main facts of the gospel in verses 2–4.<sup>3</sup> So what is the gospel? First, Paul affirms that it is no novelty but “promised beforehand...in the Holy Scriptures” (1:2). Therefore, no “gospel” that disagrees with the Old Testament can be valid.

Next, the gospel is “regarding his [God’s] **Son**” (1:3). This title does not refer to Jesus’ divinity but to His royalty. It designates Him as God’s Heir and Ruler.

Some may be startled at what we just affirmed. They assume that (a) since Jesus is God’s “one and only Son” (John 3:16), only He owns that title; (b) the title refers to His divinity, even His pre-existence. On the contrary, (a) the title is valid for many who are not divine (such as, angels, the nation Israel, Adam, Solomon, all believers), and (b) its use in Jesus’ case points to His royalty rather than His divinity. See Appendix B: The Title *Son of God*.

Appendix B refers to several passages where *Son of God* must be a human, rather than divine, title for Jesus. For example, Hebrews 1:4–5 applies to Jesus a passage (2 Sam. 7:14) in which King Solomon was called God’s “son.” God had promised David,

“I will raise up your offspring to succeed you....He is the one who will build a house for my Name....**I will be his father, and he will be my son.** When he does wrong, I will punish him....But my love will never be taken away from him....” (2 Sam. 7:12–15)

*God’s Son* is used in this royal sense in Romans 1:3 and 4. The gospel is primarily two facts about Him, as Paul points out: “his Son,

1. who was **a descendant of David** with respect to the flesh [Greek *sarks*]<sup>4</sup>
2. who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the **resurrection from the dead.**<sup>5</sup> (NET Bible, emphasis added)

---

however, he speaks of Jews in the third person (“they,” “their,” and “them” in 3:1–3 and often in chapters 9–11). This is from the standpoint of the Gentiles to whom he writes (as clearly seen in 11:13, 17–24, 30; 15:16).

<sup>3</sup> Paul’s summary in 1:2–4 agrees with the many summaries of the gospel in Acts and elsewhere. See the samples in Appendix A: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel, on page 14.

<sup>4</sup> Instead of “with respect to the **flesh**,” NIV says, “as to his **human nature**.” But that can wrongly imply a contrast between Messiah’s human and divine natures, which is not the point in Romans or the gospel. NIV also employs a similar meaning for *sarks* in 1 Corinthians 5:5 (“sinful nature”), where it does not fit.

<sup>5</sup> NIV translates the Greek verb as “declared” here but, more accurately, as “appointed” in Acts 10:42. The NET Bible says the following about this verb: “The Greek term *horidzo* is used eight times in the NT, and it always has

In other words, He (1) was born in David’s royal family and (2) was given all authority when God raised Him from death. As we have shown, these two facts point not to His divinity but to His royal authority. He has the right and the power to bring the promised kingdom. At the end of verse 4 Paul reiterates this gospel even more succinctly: “Jesus Messiah our Lord.”<sup>6</sup> All four Gospels and the evangelistic sermons in Acts emphasize these same facts.<sup>7</sup>

Those who hear the gospel should respond with “the obedience of faith” (1:5). Paul emphasizes this expression by using it here and again at the end of his letter (16:26). Grammatically, it could have any of the following (or other) meanings:

1. obedience to faith (faith looked at as a command or set of commands)
2. obedience that consists of faith
3. obedience that comes from faith<sup>8</sup>

---

the meaning ‘to determine, appoint.’ Paul is not saying that Jesus was appointed the ‘Son of God by the resurrection’ but ‘**Son-of-God-in-power** by the resurrection,’ hence the hyphenation. He was born in weakness in human flesh (*with respect to the flesh*, v. 3) and he was raised with power.” (p. 519, emphasis added)

<sup>6</sup> “Christ Himself *is* the good news. Apart from Jesus Christ there is no good news. If somebody should ask, ‘What is the gospel?’, we ought to answer, ‘The gospel is not *what*, it is *who!*’ The gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ, in His blessed person and in His mighty work. To lose Jesus is to lose the gospel.” McClain, *Romans*, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> The Gospel of Mark, for example, is a full-length sermon giving the gospel this way. Acts 10:36–43 summarizes that sermon in Mark. As stated before, Romans does not preach that sermon but explains the gospel’s power.

<sup>8</sup> The whole phrase in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 is *eis hupakoēn pisteos, to [the] obedience of faith* (faith in genitive case). In 1:5 the NIV translates, “to bring about the obedience of faith.” Consider three possible meanings.

1. Obedience **to** faith. Arguments for this meaning can include the use of similar phrases with equivalent Greek syntax elsewhere. For example, 1 Peter 1:22 speaks of “obedience to the truth” and 2 Corinthians 10:5, of “obedience to Christ.” Other passages use the verb *obey* (rather than the noun *obedience*), followed by the dative (rather than the genitive). For example, Romans 10:16 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8 speak of obeying the gospel. Acts 6:7 says that “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” However, opposed to this meaning in Romans is the fact that Paul does not elsewhere speak of *faith* as though it were a command to be obeyed.

2. Obedience **that consists of** faith. Romans 4:4–5 seems to favor this meaning. It emphasizes justification by faith rather than by works: “to the man who **does not work but trusts** God who justifies the wicked, his **faith** is credited as righteousness.” However, Paul does not intend to deny that the justified man will inevitably begin giving evidence of his new life. In that sense “a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Saving faith produces works; a new creature is transformed. For this reason Jesus warned that the wise man both “hears these words of mine and **puts them into practice**” (Matt. 7:24). This point is assumed in several passages in Romans, such as 6:15–23 (see below). The obedience true of every believer involves more than passive faith: “the obedience of the Gentiles **by word and deed**” (Rom. 15:18 in NASB, taking “word and deed” to refer to the hearers rather than the messenger).

3. Obedience that **comes from** faith. This is probably the correct meaning. It reflects the same truth as Galatians 5:6: “The only thing that counts is **faith expressing itself through love**.” This response is described in Romans 6: “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to **obey** him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you **obey**—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to **obedience**, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly **obeyed** the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Rom. 6:16–18; see 15–23). This is not optional; every believer’s obedience has made him a slave to righteousness and to God (v. 22).

Considering the apostle’s arguments elsewhere, especially in chapter 6, it probably means obedience “that **comes from faith**.” True faith obeys, as our Lord emphasized in His conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24, 26; cf. Gal. 5:6; James 2:14–26).

Next Paul writes words of appreciation for the Roman church, as well as his plan to visit them soon (1:8–15). Then (1:16–17) he prepares for the treatise by announcing his theme and quoting his text. Paul’s theme is the gospel as God’s power for salvation. “In [the gospel] a righteousness from God is revealed” in a way that transforms men (“by faith from first to last,” 1:17a). Paul’s text, from Habakkuk, is “The righteous will live by faith.”

### **Part I. Condemnation, Romans 1:18 to 3:20**

The first division of Paul’s treatise (1:18 to 3:20), which we entitle “Condemnation,” shows why the gospel is needed. This division is introduced by the statement in 1:18 that men deserve God’s wrath. It proceeds to show the lost condition of the Gentiles (non-Jews, 1:18–32), the moralists (2:1–16), the Jews (2:17 to 3:8), and the whole world (3:9–20).

**A. The Gentiles (1:18–32)** “suppress the truth by their wickedness” (1:18). Through God’s creation they knew much about Him, “his eternal power and divine nature” (1:20). But they did not like Him! “Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him” but turned to idols (1:21–23). “Therefore God gave them over...to sexual impurity” (1:24), “to shameful lusts” (1:26), and “to a depraved mind” (1:28). Verses 29–31 list many wicked things they practice in their supposed freedom, things that they know “deserve death.” But not only do they do them; they also “approve of those who practice” the same things (1:32). Instead of mourning over wickedness, they applaud it.

**B. The moralists (2:1–16)** agree with Paul’s terrible indictment of the Gentile world. A moralist is anyone, Jew or Gentile (2:9, 10), who steps forward to “pass judgment on someone else” (2:1a, 1b, 3). Now, there is nothing wrong with passing judgment in the sense of evaluating evil. Paul had just done that in chapter 1. We must do the same thing (John 7:24; Matt. 7:16, 20; 1 Cor. 6:2–5). But it is certainly wrong when “you who pass judgment **do the same things**” (2:1). Such a judge condemns himself.

Merely knowing what is right will not help “when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Messiah” (2:16). In this section Paul discusses the criteria for that coming judgment. Messiah will judge, above all, based on truth (2:2), that is, on reality, the facts of each case. Concretely, this refers to one’s works (2:6–10): “God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done’” (2:6). In a remarkable literary structure, Paul describes the two classes Messiah will distinguish (emphasis added):

- a. “To those who by **persistence in doing good** seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life....glory, honor and peace for everyone who **does good**” (2:7, 10).

- b. “But for those...who **reject the truth and follow evil**, there will be wrath and anger... trouble and distress for every human being who **does evil**...” (2:8–9).

The two classes are those who do good and those who do evil. Only those who show “persistence in doing good” will get eternal life. What will be the criterion of that goodness? God’s law, especially the covenant made at Sinai. Israel received the law as standard and will be judged by it (2:12–13). But those who do not have the law will be judged by “the requirements of the law...written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness” (2:15).

As we all know, every person’s conscience accuses him of falling short. There is no exception. What, then, will happen to the second principle of judgment? Will God overlook our deeds? Will Messiah despair of finding persons who persist in doing good? Of course not, because through the gospel God both accepts us and makes us able to do good and pass the test.<sup>9</sup> That will be Paul’s argument starting at Romans 3:21.

**C. The Jews (2:17 to 3:8)**, of course, do have the law. In it God revealed His divine standard of behavior. But the law will not save the Jew because he does not keep it (2:17–24). Gentiles who keep the law without having it are better off than disobedient Jews (2:25–27). In fact, no Jew **deserves** that name unless he has “circumcision of the heart,” not just of the flesh (2:28–29).

If transforming faith is required of Jews as much as Gentiles, why is it better to be a Jew? Not because guilty Jews avoid God’s judgment but because they have received His word (3:1–8). Israel’s lack of faith cannot nullify God’s faithfulness but—in contrast—only enhance it. Their sin serves to show God’s goodness. But that fact will not allow them to escape His judgment.

**D. The whole world (3:9–20)**, then, is condemned. The law itself shows “that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (3:9). Paul quotes many statements from Scripture to that effect (3:10–18). God’s law could not save anyone because no one could keep it. It revealed God’s righteousness to mankind’s representative nation; but by condemning them it condemned us all (3:19–20). That sad conclusion shows why the gospel is essential, why “a righteousness from God, **apart from law**, has been made known” (3:21).

## Part II. Salvation, Romans 3:21 to 8:39

The second division of the treatise (3:21 to 8:39) can be entitled “Salvation.” Since man, even with God’s law, is hopelessly lost, God reveals His own method for saving man. This salvation has three aspects:

1. Justification, in which God declares a sinner righteous (3:21 to 5:21)
2. Sanctification, in which God makes the justified sinner holy like Himself (chs. 6–7)
3. Preservation, in which He keeps that person to the end (ch. 8)

<sup>9</sup> See “Appendix C: Eternal Life for Those Who Do Good?”

**A. Justification, Romans 3:21 to 5:21**

God's method of justification (outlined in 3:21–31) is by faith in Messiah and on the basis of Messiah's sacrifice. It is by God's grace (3:24), meaning that man cannot merit it with any kind of works or obedience to the law. No merely human religion could have dreamed up such a marvelous method. Yet, as Paul shows, this method honors the law by paying its penalty and accomplishing its purposes.

*Abraham was saved by faith (4:1–25).* Salvation by faith did not originate when Messiah came. It was by faith that Abraham obtained these three things:

1. righteousness (justification)
2. God's promise that he would inherit the world
3. descendants who will inherit with him

Consider these three things Abraham obtained by faith. (1) Righteousness does not come from works, such as using religious symbols. Scripture shows that Abraham was justified by faith before he received the God-given sign of circumcision. (2) Abraham—along with all his true descendants—had his future guaranteed by God's promise. It was a promise rather than a contract. Therefore, it could not be nullified by man breaking God's law nor be limited by that law to Jews only. (3) Abraham's faith that resulted in his having descendants was—like our own faith—in a God that brings life out of death.

*Faith gives assuring results (5:1–11).* This divine method of salvation by faith brings powerful and assuring results. When God in love reconciled believers through Messiah's death, we were ungodly, helpless, and God's enemies. Now that we are reconciled, He will even more surely save us through Messiah's life. He will see to it that trials help us. Nothing can really hurt us nor take away His love ("poured out...by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us," 5:5).

*Salvation by faith is universal in extent (5:12–21).* Paul concludes this consideration of justification by showing that God's method is also universal in extent. He shows this by comparing Adam and Messiah, the two heads of mankind. Adam in Eden committed one act of transgression; Messiah at the cross made a supreme act of obedience. Adam's act brought sin and death to all in him; Messiah's act brings justification and life to all in Him. Where death reigned through Adam, grace now reigns through righteousness to eternal life.

Are you one of those who "receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness" in Messiah (5:17)?

**B. Sanctification, Romans 6–7**

Romans 6–7 deal with the question of how God overcomes sin and makes people holy like Himself. Holiness and sanctification are the same thing and, in Greek, the same word. This word appears for the first times in Romans at 6:19 and 6:22.

*How to be sanctified (Romans 6).* In Romans 6 Paul tells the right way to be sanctified: through due recognition of what God has already accomplished. Paul explains this by answering two questions (in 6:1 and 6:15) arising from God’s method of justification by grace based on faith alone:

1. The first question is based on the facts that grace (a) made no moral demands (3:24, 27–28; 4:4–8; 5:10) and yet (b) triumphs over all sin (5:20–21). Does grace, then, encourage living in sin (6:1)?
2. The second question is based on the fact that believers are under grace rather than under law. Does grace, then, encourage sinning on any given occasion (6:15)?

The answer to the first question (6:1–14) is based on the believer’s union with Messiah. By faith (and as pictured in baptism) we were joined to Messiah in His death and resurrection. When that happened, we died to sin and arose to God. How can we possibly live in the sin we died to? Sanctification involves knowing about this death and resurrection of ours (6:6) and counting on it in daily life (6:11). In accord with this reality, we should present ourselves to God as those alive from the dead (6:13). Thus, being under grace assures us of victory never possible to those under law.

The answer to the second question (6:15–23) is based on the fact that we chose a new Master. That also happened when we believed in Messiah. Before that, we were slaves to sin, a slavery resulting in death. But now we are slaves of righteousness and God—and will receive His gift of eternal life.<sup>10</sup> For us to obey sin at all, then, is both unnecessary and contradictory.

*How not to be sanctified (Romans 7).* In Romans 7 Paul tells the wrong way to be sanctified: through the law. In fact, we are dead to the law. Just as we are now dead to sin (verses 1–6 of chapter 6), we are also dead to the law (verses 1–6 of chapter 7). We used to be “married” to the law (7:1, 4–6), and our sinful passions bore fruit for death (7:5). But now, having died with Messiah, we are joined to the risen Messiah and bear fruit for God (7:4).

Our failure under the law does not mean that the law is sinful (7:7–13). In fact, it is holy. But it reveals our sin (for example, our coveting, 7:7) and even provokes it (7:8). Sin may seem dormant until the law comes; at that point sin wakes up and kills the one it inhabits (7:9–13). This happened to every Jew who grew up under the law.

The rest of the chapter (7:14–25) shows how impossible it is to achieve victory over sin by means of the law. No one—whether justified or not—can be sanctified by his own strength in obedience to the law. In three similar cycles (7:14–17, 18–20, 21–25) Paul shows this inability of the flesh to be righteous as the law requires. The reason for failure is that in one’s body there

---

<sup>10</sup> Paul points out that slavery is an inadequate human figure of speech. In fact, our “slavery” to God is the greatest liberty possible (John 8:32).

is a law (a principle and power) of sin that leads to death. Victory comes only through Messiah (7:25), as Paul has already shown in chapter 6.<sup>11</sup>

### C. Preservation, Romans 8

How long will salvation by grace through faith hold good? Forever! As Messiah Jesus said: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish” (John 10:28). This is the same truth Romans 8 emphasizes as it brings to a conclusion the subject of salvation. It shows that nothing can thwart God’s plans for a person who through faith is in Messiah. That person is eternally secure.

#### 1. Victory over Sin, 8:1–11

Romans 8:1–11 proclaims this fact of security and gives the first reason why it is so: namely, that God’s method of salvation frees us from sin and death and gives us righteousness and life.

The fact of security is proclaimed in 8:1. It is based on God’s way of justifying and sanctifying just presented in 3:21 to 7:25: “**Therefore**, there is **now** no condemnation” (8:1, emphasis added). The word translated “now” does not imply that there may be condemnation later; instead, it strengthens the idea in “therefore.” The New English Bible says it well: “The conclusion of the matter is this: there is no condemnation.”

This fact of security combines two thoughts from earlier in Romans: “no condemnation” and “in Messiah.”

1. “No condemnation” means no doom—including punishment and loss. This looks back to 5:16, 18. In those verses Paul contrasted two conditions and their causes: (a) our former condemnation and its cause in Adam and his sin, (b) our justification and its cause in Messiah’s act of righteousness.
2. “In Messiah” is a key expression found in 8:1, 3, 5, 11, and 23. This reflects 6:3–5, which traced our victory over sin (that is, our sanctification) to union with Messiah.

Introduced by the word “for” (v. 2), the first reason for no condemnation is stated positively in 8:2–4: God has now truly freed us to become holy. Previously, every person who attempted to keep God’s holy law of commandments (given to Israel) found the struggle hopeless. Why? Because the sin that lived in us maintained its mastery and produced death. This was the “law of sin and death” (8:2) that Paul had discovered in 7:14–25 (see especially 7:23). But by sending His Son to be like us and to sacrifice Himself for our sin (8:3), God changed the course of our history. Now we are united with this once-dead-but-now-risen Messiah (6:3–11; 7:4) and have received His Spirit (5:5). Therefore, we can now live in the new way of the Spirit (7:6), here called “the law of the Spirit of life” (8:2).

---

<sup>11</sup> This section in chapter 7 reflects the impotency of mankind that we saw in the section on condemnation. Even the godliest of men—those who try the hardest—realize that they fall far short. We cannot reach God’s standard on our own.



Paul has previously said that we are not under God’s law of commandments (6:14; 7:4; 10:4). Yet, “the righteous requirements of the law” (8:4a; cf. 2:26) are being fulfilled in us “who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (8:4b).<sup>12</sup> Whom do these words describe? All believers. All believers no longer walk in darkness but in the light, as Jesus promised (John 8:12; 1 John 1:6–7).<sup>13</sup> For all of them the Spirit has brought the power for holiness. Their sin is conquered; there will be no condemnation.

Why can those who have the Spirit please God? Why can they fulfill God’s desires as seen in His law of commandments, whereas others (those “according to the sinful nature”) cannot? Romans 8:5–8 explains why: because of the difference in mindset.<sup>14</sup> The mindset of the indwelling Spirit is toward life and peace (8:6). The mindset of the flesh—in contrast—is death, that is (or, because), it produces enmity against God, rebellion (8:7, also 7:14–25). Because of their mindset, fleshly people cannot possibly please God, even when they are “good” or “religious.”

Romans 8:9–11 affirms that this presence of Messiah’s Spirit in a believer also guarantees life for the believer’s body (see 8:23). Though the body is presently “dead” due to the sin principle still in it, the spirit is now life because of the righteousness principle in it (8:10). And God will see to it that His Spirit of life will resurrect our bodies just as He resurrected Jesus the Messiah (8:11). Thus, Messiah through His Spirit brings life both to spirit and body.

## 2. Victory over Suffering, 8:12–30

The second reason for a believer’s security is that God’s method of salvation gives victory over suffering. It carries the believer through all troubles to a predestined glory (8:12–30). This section deals fully with the theme of suffering and glory that was touched in 5:1–11.

To begin this section, 8:12–13 reiterates the truth of 8:1–11 as an obligation (“we have an obligation”). Our obligation depends on whether we have chosen the gospel or not. (a) If not, we will live according to the sinful nature, which leads to death (8:13a). This sums up 8:5–8, also 6:16, 21, 23. (b) If we have chosen the gospel, however, we will live by the Spirit, which leads to life (8:13b). This sums up 8:2–4, also 6:16–18, 22.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The King James Version and many late manuscripts have this same clause in Romans 8:1. Most textual critics believe it was not there originally. But if it was, it probably meant the same as in 8:4, that there is no condemnation for those in Messiah because the Spirit has truly given them a new life.

<sup>13</sup> “Whoever follows me **will never walk in darkness**, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). This hardly favors the interpretation that some believers do walk in darkness. Instead, all believers “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7). This is true because they “have fellowship with him” (1 John 1:3, 6, 7), which means that they participate in His life. It does not mean that they are perfect; they confess the sins revealed by the light (1:9). But there is also a process in which “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1:7).

<sup>14</sup> The word translated “mind” in Romans 8:5–7 includes mind, affections, and will.

<sup>15</sup> This interpretation assumes that the “you” who “live according to the sinful nature” and “die” as a result, are the same unsaved people so described in 8:5. Such people cannot live according to the Spirit until they are reborn. All Christians, however, made that choice and can continue to make it. They are “according to the Spirit” and not “according to the sinful nature” (8:5). They “are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit” (8:9). There-

Why will those in the Spirit truly live? Because the life the Spirit gives is that of God’s sons (8:14–17a). He witnesses within us—and our own spirit joyfully concurs—that God is now our Father. Fear is gone. Since God has accepted us for adoption—and actually made us to be born into His family, we are therefore His heirs.

Knowing that we will share Messiah’s glory helps us triumph in our sufferings (8:17–25). But do all true believers so suffer, and therefore qualify for glory? Certainly yes—to varying degrees. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10–11; cf. John 15:20; Phil. 1:29).<sup>16</sup> The words translated “if indeed we share in his sufferings” (8:17b), in effect mean “assuming that in reality we are Christians.”

Thus, present suffering with Messiah will result in future glory with Him, glory so great that our present suffering is not worth comparing to it (8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). This glory will be “revealed in regard to us” (8:18, probable meaning of Greek), which implies that the glory will involve more than believers themselves. Indeed, it involves all creation (that is, nature; 8:19–21). We believers will be revealed for what we are (8:19; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:1–2); so will creation.

Similarly to believers, creation now suffers from a condition that was not original (8:20, 22) and that will be relieved (8:21). As a result of man’s fall (Gen. 3), creation “was subjected to futility” (8:20, NASB), that is, made “to attain to no good end permanently” (Stifler). Perhaps that is why cold winds moan and earthquakes shake. “All the voices of nature are in the minor key.” All things sigh before God, as Bonar sang:

Come and make all things new;  
Build up this ruined earth;  
Restore our faded paradise,  
Creation’s second birth.<sup>17</sup>

Creation’s moaning will be answered; glorious future relief will come. Jesus called that relief “the rebirth” (Matt. 19:28, Greek). Peter called it “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21, NASB). Isaiah (11:6–9; 35:1–10; etc.) and others described it. Therefore, as Romans 8:22–23 reiterates, creation and believers are side by side, both groaning and waiting for their full redemption. Everything that was lost in the fall will be recovered.

---

fore, they “by the Spirit...put to death the misdeeds of the body” (8:13). The pace of their sanctification will vary; some are more obedient than others. But God will eventually accomplish in all of them what He intended when He “condemned sin in sinful man” (8:3) and enabled them to “not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (8:4). To some extent they are all “led by the Spirit of God” (8:14).

<sup>16</sup> From the “faithful” hymn of 2 Timothy 2:11–12, Paul cites a similar statement: that all true believers will endure through trials and will reign with Messiah. Most Christians in the world understand what it is to suffer for righteousness’ sake. Such suffering comes partly from external causes and partly from internal concerns. The degree of suffering depends a lot on the degree of difference between Christians and their culture. When the salt loses its savor, there is little reaction and little influence.

<sup>17</sup> Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 144–145.

This future glory is no less than the kingdom believers will inherit with the Lord. For example, James 2:5 reflects Matthew 5:3 when it speaks of “the poor [who are] rich in faith and...inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him.” In Matthew 25:31 the Lord comes to sit on “His throne in heavenly glory.” Then, as King, He invites the blessed of His Father to “take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you...” (25:34), which is the same as “eternal life” (25:46). Hebrews 2:5–10 shows that Jesus’ suffering was designed to prepare many “sons” for the “glory” of “the world to come.”<sup>18</sup>

This future glory includes the completed adoption when believers’ bodies will be redeemed (8:23; 1 Cor. 15:51–56; Phil. 3:20–21). They will have redeemed bodies to reign in a redeemed world. This entire expectation for the future is the “hope” in which (not “by which”) they were saved (8:24–25). Christian hope has two meanings: (1) as here (8:24), one’s present confidence regarding the future, (2) the future realization of that confidence. In the first meaning that hope is essential to a believer’s faith (also Heb. 11:1). In the second meaning it is equivalent to the believer’s “inheritance,” as in the conclusion to Paul’s great doxology in Ephesians 1:3–14. Most of that inheritance is still future; in the Spirit we have only the beginnings of it (“the first-fruits,” 8:23).

So a believer’s hope is unbelievable glory as God’s heir. How highly favored we are! Yet, we are presently deficient; we do not even know what to ask for in prayer (8:26). But the divine Spirit within us, who knows both us and God, makes intercession in perfect agreement with God’s purposes and plans (8:27). His pleas cannot be put into human words; yet God understands Him.

Thus, the Spirit’s intercession is in harmony with God’s control. God makes all things work together to accomplish His eternal purpose for His elect (those He has chosen, called “chosen” in 8:33). We reveal that we are elect by our love for God, which we received when He called us (8:28).

According to God’s purpose He

1. foreknew us
2. predestined us to become like His Son
3. called us so that we responded
4. justified us (declared us righteous through faith in Messiah)
5. glorified us (assured our final destiny)

These five divine acts (8:29–30) are like five golden links binding each believer to God’s purpose in eternity past and its fulfillment in eternity future. Consider each of them:

---

<sup>18</sup> There are many more references. For example, Hebrews 12:25–28 shows that the believer’s confidence is in receiving, after God shakes all other things, “a kingdom that cannot be shaken.” The Lamb is worthy, says Revelation 5:9–10, because He died to redeem people from all nations to be “a kingdom and priests” who “will reign on the earth” (cf. 22:5).

1. Foreknew. This means more than seeing beforehand who would believe. The word *know* is used by the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) for God’s taking special note of someone, as in Psalms 1:6 (“watches over”); 144:3 (“care for”); and Hosea 13:5 (“cared for”). In fact, this knowledge is akin to choice, as in Amos 3:2 (“You only have I **chosen** of all the families of the earth”). A New Testament example of the same meaning is Matthew 7:23 (“I never knew you”). *Foreknow* or *foreknowledge* adds the idea of having this knowledge in advance, as it does here in Romans 8:29 (also 11:2; 1 Peter 1:2, 20; Acts 2:23).

God did not wait to see which people would respond to the gospel. He ordained some to eternal life before they believed (Acts 13:48), then enabled them to believe (Eph. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:9). In themselves they were incapable of believing, did not seek God (Rom. 3:11), and could not be subject to His law (Rom. 8:7). In fact, they were dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5).

2. Predestined. Those God foreknew He predestined to become like Messiah. Though Messiah was the first to attain glory, He will not remain alone. He will be the “firstborn” (the greatest, 8:29) among many sons of God.
3. Called. Those God predestined He also called (8:28, 30). In the epistles this always means an “efficacious” call, one that results in obedience (see Rom. 1:6; 9:11; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24; Jude 1; 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:11).
- 4–5. Justified and Glorified. Those God called He justified (declared them to be righteous). He did this on the basis of Messiah’s sacrifice for them, as explained in Romans 3:21 to 5:21. Those same people He glorified, the end of the sanctification process dealt with in Romans 6–7.

In none of these steps does God lose anyone. Once God has selected someone for His grace, He will fulfill His purpose for him. The divine Sculptor has chosen a rough slab of marble from which to make a beautiful figure. The marble must undergo much chipping before the image is complete—but the Sculptor will not allow it to be ruined. In His mind the process is as good as done; in the slab He already sees one like Messiah.

### 3. Victory Hymn, 8:31–39

Romans 8:31–39 sum up the first eight chapters in a grand “Hymn of the Assurance of Salvation” (Godet). This hymn poses and answers four questions (quoted from the New KJV):

1. If God is for us, who can be against us? (8:31)
2. Who shall bring a charge against [that is, successfully accuse] God’s elect? (8:33)
3. Who is he who condemns? (8:34)
4. Who shall separate us from the love of Messiah? (8:35)

Notice that in each case the question is not “what” but “who.” “Who” refers to personal agents who might work against us, using various means. In each case the answer amounts to “No one!” The first answer (8:32) reminds us that God is indeed for us. He already gave us His greatest treasure, His own Son. If one gives a costly jewel, can he withhold the jewel case or chain that goes with it?

The second answer (8:33) reminds us that God has already looked at all our offences and freed us from all guilt. Could someone discover an offence God overlooked?

The third answer (8:34) reminds us who the appointed Judge is (see Acts 10:42), the only One who can condemn. The Judge Himself died for our sins, rose to give us His Spirit, and makes intercession for us at God’s right hand.

The fourth answer (8:35–39) surveys all space and time to find someone with power to cut us off from the love of Messiah. Why does Paul say so much about this point? Because we need lots of encouragement—our troubles are numerous and sometimes loom large and black to our limited vision.

The apostle’s eye looks through all time, through all space, and through all worlds. Then, in the most sweeping language, he asserts his persuasion that there is nothing “able” to break the golden chain that binds the heart of God to His people.<sup>19</sup>

Have you accepted this everlasting love?

---

<sup>19</sup> Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 152.

## Appendix A: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel

*This list includes some of the shorter summaries of the gospel and clear references to it. It does not include the lengthy sermon summaries in Acts, such as at Pentecost (Acts 2; see v. 36) and at the “Gentile Pentecost” (Acts 10; see vv. 42–43).*

**Acts 5:42** “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped preaching and proclaiming the good news that **Jesus is the Messiah.**”

9:22 “Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that **Jesus is the Messiah.**” (This means the same as the summary in James 2:1—and similar summaries—“believers in our **glorious Lord Jesus Messiah.**”)

17:2–3 “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and...reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the **Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,’** he said.”

18:5 “Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that **Jesus was the Messiah.**”

20:21 Paul reminded “the elders of the church” in Ephesus that “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must **turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.**”

24:24 “Felix came with his wife Drusilla...He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about **faith in Messiah Jesus.**” (See also 8:12; 18:5, 28; 28:23, 31.)

**Romans 1:1–4** God’s “Son, who as to his human nature was **a descendant of David** and who... was declared with power to be the Son of God by his **resurrection from the dead.**”

Romans 1:16–17 does not summarize the gospel but introduces the main theme, why the gospel is God’s power for salvation. Likewise, 3:21–26 does not give the gospel’s content but emphasizes that, unlike law, it works by faith. That subject is developed in the next chapters. Romans 2:16 says that the gospel includes judgment by Messiah.

6:3–4 Implies what was preached: “All of us who were baptized into **Messiah Jesus** were baptized into **his death**...in order that, just as **Messiah was raised from the dead**...we too may live a new life.”

10:8–10 “the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘**Jesus is Lord,**’ and believe in your heart that **God raised him from the dead,** you will be saved.”

16:25–26 “Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of **Jesus Messiah....**”

**1 Corinthians 1:17–18, 23** “The **cross of Messiah**...the message of **the cross**...we preach **Messiah crucified.**”

2:2 “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Messiah and him crucified.**” (Cf. 8:11, “weak brother, for whom Messiah died.” 10:16 and 11:26, the Lord’s Supper is participation in Messiah’s blood and body. 6:2–3 reminds believers that they will

**Appendix A: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel**

---

judge the world, including angels. 6:9–10 reminds them that they will inherit the coming kingdom.)

3:11 “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is **Jesus Messiah.**”

8:6 “There is but **one God, the Father...**and there is but **one Lord, Jesus Messiah...**”

12:3 “No one can say, ‘**Jesus is Lord,**’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

15:1–11 “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you....By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you....What I received I passed on to you:...that **Messiah died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, that he **was buried**, that he **was raised** on the third day...and that he **appeared** to Peter...to me also....This is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

According to Acts 18:5, the message (gospel) first preached at Corinth was simpler and shorter: “**Jesus is Messiah.**” The two versions can be harmonized by simply emphasizing the fact from the longer version that **it was “Messiah”** who died and rose. The reason for His death was probably not essential to the original message but was a corollary important to 1 Corinthians 15 (see v. 17). Even more important for that chapter was the fact of His resurrection, as proof of our own resurrection. See verses 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, and 23.

**Galatians 3:6ff** “The Scripture...announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “**All nations will be blessed through you.**”

**2 Timothy 2:8** “Remember **Jesus Messiah, raised from the dead, descended from David.** This is my gospel.”

**Titus 2:13–14** “We wait for the blessed hope—the **glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Messiah, who gave himself for us** to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

**Hebrews 2:3–5** “This salvation, which was **first announced by the Lord...the world to come,** about which we are speaking.”

**1 Peter 1:3** “Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah...has given us new birth into a living hope through the **resurrection of Jesus Messiah** from the dead.”

1:19–21 “redeemed...with the precious **blood of Messiah...chosen...revealed...raised... from the dead and glorified**” (also 2:21, 24, 25; 3:15, 18, 21–22; etc.)

**1 John 1:1–3** “We proclaim to you **what we have seen and heard** [as recorded in the Gospels], so that you also may have fellowship with us.”

## Appendix B: The Title *Son of God*

*This is a brief summary of my study by the same name.*

Romans 1:2–3 says that “the gospel of God” is “regarding **his Son.**” Verse 4 adds that He “was appointed the **Son-of-God-in-power** according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead” (NET Bible). This paper considers the meaning of that title.

There is much scriptural evidence that Jesus was pre-existent and divine. However, His title *Son [of God]* seldom, if ever, meant that. It was often used for beings who were not divine, such as, angels, the nation Israel, the first man, and all believers in Messiah. In Jesus’ case it was usually royal, equivalent to *Messiah*, the promised King. Thus, it was a human, rather than divine, title.

There are clear examples of this human meaning for Jesus’ title *Son [of God]* in the following:

- The Gospel of Luke. Luke 1:35 shows it belonged to Him after birth, not before. Luke 4:41 substitutes *Messiah* for it. So do 22:67 and 70.
- The Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews 1:4 says it was a name He **obtained**; 1:5 traces it to Old Testament messianic predictions.
- Psalm 2. This messianic psalm equates the title to the Lord’s Anointed One (Messiah), the King, who **becomes** the Son (v. 7) and inherits the nations. Such language, used at Jesus’ baptism, was like that used in Ancient Near East coronation texts.
- The Davidic Covenant. 2 Samuel 7:14 calls even Solomon (as well as Messiah) God’s son.
- The Great Confession. In the Synoptic Gospels only Matthew adds this title, showing that it means basically the same as *Messiah*.
- Apostolic Preaching. In Acts *Son of God* is rarely used. When it is, it is probably equivalent to *Messiah*. In Romans 1:2–4 the title is related to Jesus’ birth and resurrection.

In the Gospel of John Jesus revealed a lot about His sonship. For example, it (a) was unique, (b) was related to the Father’s sending Him on a mission, (c) had many aspects, (d) was sometimes, if not always, equivalent to messiahship. This fourth point is evident in the use of the title, for example, by John the Baptist (1:32–34), Nathanael (1:49), Peter (6:69), Martha (11:27), and the purpose statement (20:31).

It is doubtful that this title ever lacks the human and royal emphasis. Like *Messiah*, it describes His dignity as the predicted King. He is the Father’s royal heir (Luke 20:14). That is the core of the message in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, a message we should not neglect in our preaching.

However, *Son of God* quickly leads to another conclusion: that the Messiah is also divine. Jesus showed the Jews that their purely human Messiah did not fit all the Scriptures. For Messiah’s forefather David called his future descendant “Lord” (Matt. 22:41–46). In that case, Jesus asked, “how can he be his [David’s] son?” The answer, of course, is that as God’s Son He is more than human. Those who believe in Him as Messiah will soon admit His divinity.



### Appendix C: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?

Romans 2:2–16 gives four principles by which God will judge the world:

- a. by truth (the abstract principle), 2:2–5
- b. by deeds (the concrete principle), 2:6–10
- c. without respect of persons, 2:11–15
- d. by means of Messiah, 2:16

The most attention is given to the second principle, verses 6–10, stated in a remarkable structure. There are “four triplets, balanced against one another” and including repetitions and reversals of order. These triplets speak about people who do good deeds and people who do evil deeds—and what they will get in judgment. In each and every triplet, the three lines deal with the character, the pursuits, and the appropriate awards of the good or the bad. Sometimes the order of those lines is reversed.<sup>20</sup>

Such statement and restatement emphasize what is taught: In the judgment God will give eternal life to those who do good and condemn those who do evil. Look at what is said about the former group:

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by **persistence in doing good** seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life....glory, honor and peace for everyone who **does good**. (2:6–7, 10)

Later verses specify in what way some people do good:

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who **obey the law** who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, **do by nature things required by the law**....) (2:13–14)

If those who are not circumcised **keep the law’s requirements**...The one who is not circumcised physically and yet **obeys the law**.... (2:26–27)

It seems clear, then, that some people—even some “Gentiles who do not have the law”—do good by obeying the law. Those who persist in doing good, says Romans 2:6–10 with much emphasis, will be given eternal life. How are we to understand such statements, especially in view of the purpose and conclusions of this section (1:18 to 3:20)?

- a. This section is designed to prove not that some are all right but that all are condemned.
- b. The conclusion claims that “there is no one who does good, not even one” (3:12). It also asserts that the law’s function (rather than to help some get saved) is that “every mouth may be silenced and the whole world be held accountable to God” (3:19).
- c. It is mankind’s incapacity to do good which calls for the doctrine of salvation by faith in the next section.

---

<sup>20</sup> James M. Stifler (*The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 39–40), adapting from John Forbes.

---

### Appendix C: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?

---

In other words, we have a dilemma; the apostle seem to contradict himself. (a) Since he denies that anyone does good (3:12), it would seem that good people do not exist. Yet, (b) he repeatedly refers to good people in chapter 2. Furthermore, the principle of judgment according to deeds could never result in eternal life if there will be no good people.

Some avoid this dilemma by denying that the “good” people of Romans 2 actually exist. They are hypothetical people, not real ones. This view implies that even the picture Romans 2 draws of the judgment is hypothetical. But the view is weak since there is no hint in Romans 2 that such people do not exist or that the judgment will only condemn.

Another solution admits that there will be “good” people in the judgment—but **not good enough** to get eternal life. This view assumes that the standard must be perfection (cf. Gal. 3:10). But Romans 2 calls for “persistence,” not “perfection.”

Here are two other solutions from well-known commentators (with emphasis added). Each of them believes that Romans 2:6–10 describes real good people who really receive eternal life in the real judgment. Each of these commentators solves the dilemma by the way he defines “doing good” (“well doing” in KJV). The first one defines it only as faith. The second one includes also deeds that result from faith.

- What is welldoing in this age? **Welldoing in this age is believing** on the name of the Son of God. “What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Jn 6:28–29, ASV).<sup>21</sup>
- [The apostle] is not speaking here of faith’s beginning, but of its completion; not of justification, but of judgment. **The deeds that gain a reward clearly imply faith** in him who does them. For in the opposite side of the parallel indignation and wrath are said to come to those who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; that is, this sad award comes to them as a result of their unbelief.<sup>22</sup>

Will every person justified by faith also practice good deeds? Of course. That is the glory of the gospel and the covenant of the Spirit—to make us good. By these God not only declares us righteous; He also transforms us (“We shall be like him,” 1 John 3:2; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).<sup>23</sup> This is an essential teaching of Romans 1–8.

Jesus pictured the same judgment event as Romans 2, and the same two groups. The event: “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). The two groups: those “in their graves [who] will hear his voice and come out—**those who have done good** will rise to live, and **those who have done evil** will rise to be condemned” (5:28–29). In his excellent commentary on John, Leon Morris comments on these verses (emphasis added):

---

<sup>21</sup> Alva J. McClain, *Romans: the Gospel of God’s Grace*, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> James M. Stiffler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>23</sup> To use theological terms, *imputation* inevitably leads to *sanctification*.

### Appendix C: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?

---

This does not mean that salvation is on the basis of good works, for this very Gospel makes it plain over and over again that men enter eternal life when they believe on Jesus Christ. But **the lives they live form the test of the faith they profess**. This is the uniform testimony of Scripture. Salvation is by grace and it is received through faith. Judgment is based on men’s works.

Morris also quotes John Calvin regarding the same verses:

He **marks out believers by their good works**, just as elsewhere He says that a tree is known by its fruit...The Papists’ inference from these passages, that eternal life repays the merits of works, may be refuted without any difficulty. For Christ is not here treating of the cause of salvation, but only distinguishing the elect from the reprobate by their own mark.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 322.