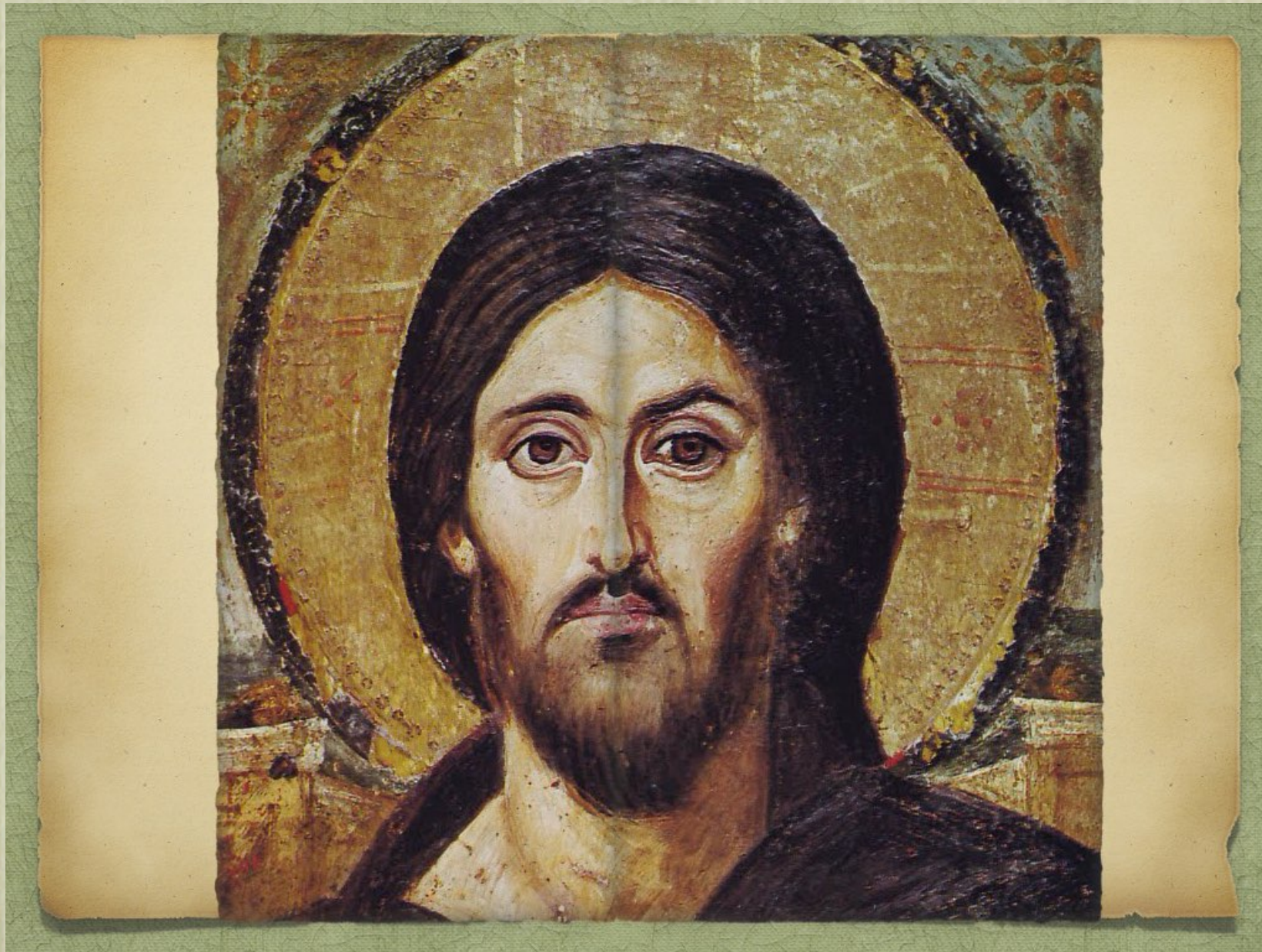


10. Romans 8:14-39



Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons (υἱοὶ) of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. You have received the spirit of adoption. When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children (τέκνα) of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with the Messiah.

‘Because you have received adoption as sons (υἱοί), God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a son (υἱός), and if a son then also an heir’ (Galatians 4:6-7).

The nearest we get to an individual addressing God as ‘Abba is in Psalm 89, where God says of David: ‘He shall cry to me: “You are my Father (‘abî), my God, and the Rock of my salvation!”’ (Psalm 89:26).

Romans 8:17-18

We are joint heirs with the Messiah if we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

Paul's thought soars as he contemplates the glory that will be ours when we attain our inheritance and enjoy the eternal communion of those raised to life. However, his eyes are on Jesus. While in this world Jesus suffered. Paul's gospel is not simply about Jesus' faith and love. It is about the faith and love of Jesus in the face of sin and suffering. As he wrote to the Galatians: 'It was before your eyes that Jesus the Messiah was publicly exhibited as crucified!' (Galatians 3:1).

In the same letter Paul prayed: 'may I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus the Messiah' (Galatians 6:4). This is why he can thank God in his correspondence with the Corinthians that he himself is walking the way of the cross (2Corinthians 2:14). Paul knows that the way to glory is through being faithful to love in the real circumstances of our lives in this time between the resurrection of Jesus and the parousia; and this means through suffering, but, as he wrote to the Corinthians: 'this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure' (2 Corinthians 4:17).

1Romans 8:19-21

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subject to futility [‘unable to attain its goal’], not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Paul’s mind goes back to the story of Genesis which reflects on the fact that human sin adversely affects the whole of creation (see Genesis 3:17-19). When right order between human beings and God is disrupted, everything is out of joint. Instead of it being a garden, the world is rank with weeds, the walls are crumbling and it finds itself subject to pollution and decay.

The Genesis narrative does not portray a temporal sequence of what it was like before the ‘Fall’ and what it is like after. Rather it is a reflection in story of what creation is meant to be as it comes from the hand of God, and what it is actually like because of sin.

Paul is also thinking of the promise of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22). Because of who God is there was always hope. As creation groans under the weight of human sin, so creation yearns for ‘the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints’ (1 Thessalonians 3:13). ‘Through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness’ (Galatians 5:5), and creation eagerly waits with us.

Romans 8:22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Just as the created world suffers the effects of human sin, so it will share in the communion and the resplendent glory of those who live God's life. Everything is connected. We all belong to each other. We are all part of the one creation, and so the whole of creation **'groans together'** (συστενάζω), and suffers the pains of **labour** together (συνωδίνω). We are part of this groaning, and it is pain that is to issue in new life.

We ‘**have the Spirit**’ (8:9), which ‘**has been given to us**’ (5:5). But, as yet, it is the first fruits. The full harvest is yet to come. God has put ‘his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment’ (2 Corinthians 1:22). ‘While we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish ... that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee’ (2 Corinthians 5:4-5).

We are God’s adopted sons (8:14), and therefore ‘heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus’ (8:17). We, both men and women, are adopted ‘sons’, because we are sharing in the life of God’s Son. We must await that part of sonship that is concerned with inheritance: ‘**the redemption of our bodies**’. Complete salvation, therefore, must await ‘the day of the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 5:5).

‘Now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life’ (Romans 5:9-10).

At the same time, Paul can say that ‘**in hope we were saved**’ (8:24). From God’s side nothing more needs to be done. From our side, however, we must continue to open our hearts to God’s gift and continue to say Yes to the inspiration of God’s Spirit. We must continue ‘**patiently doing good**’ (2:7), and be ‘steadfast in hope’ (1 Thessalonians 1:3), ‘for we walk by faith, not by sight’ (2 Corinthians 5:7), ‘because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal’ (2 Corinthians 4:18). While **hope** is concerned with the future it is not the same as longing. Rather it is the trust of one who can leave the future securely in God’s hands, knowing God’s faithfulness, and so focusing on the only thing that matters: ‘faith working through love’ (Galatians 5:6).

Romans 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

In our groaning, in our longing, we know that we are not alone. Jesus himself is longing for us to be with him in glory, and his Spirit within us groans as we groan. We breathe with Jesus' breath. Our love is Jesus' love poured into our hearts. 'We have the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16). He is our 'righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). Our prayer is Jesus' prayer in us, his breath, his Spirit, his communion with the Father. We are caught up in Jesus' love for his Father and in the peace which he enjoyed not only when he retired to a lonely place to pray, but also in those times of painful self-giving when he emptied himself to be with others in their need.

The prayer of Jesus wells up from our ‘**inmost self**’ (7:22). In the temple of our bodies there is heard a prayer of wonder, of praise, of gratitude, of trust, of supplication. This prayer is beyond our comprehension, for it is Jesus himself who is praying in us. It can be experienced in the fleeting movements of desire and love, the fleeting glances when we look at the one who never takes his eyes off us. We are weak, but we are not alone: Jesus’ Spirit ‘**helps us**’ (συναντιλαμβάνομαι). Whatever our weakness, we can experience the fruit of Jesus’ contemplation and love.

Paul goes on to stress again that the initiative in all this belongs to God. It is an initiative of God's gracious love. It is God who draws everyone into divine communion and who longs to share with us the divine life, peace and glory. It is Jesus who revealed this and it is Jesus's love, given us by his Spirit, that makes it possible for us.

To open our minds and hearts in faith to the prayer of the Spirit is to make it possible for the whole created universe to give expression to its ultimate purpose in being caught up in a universal hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Romans 8:28

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

Since God is love, God does not force our will. For God's grace to be effective we must welcome it and respond. This is what Paul means by exhorting us to 'love God'.

Our mind goes to key texts of the Old Testament: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

'I show steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments' (Deuteronomy 5:10).

To 'love God' means to welcome God's love and to respond faithfully to the covenant. In light of how basic this idea is to the Old Testament, and how frequently John speaks of our love for God, it comes as something of a surprise that this is one of only three texts in which Paul speaks of our love for God. Both the others find echoes in our present text.

The first is a quotation: 'As it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' (1Corinthians 2:9).

'Anyone who loves God is known by him' (1Corinthians 8:3).

It is not that the concept is rare. Rather it is that when Paul speaks of our primary response to God he prefers to use the language of faith. For Paul, love comes from God to Jesus, from Jesus to his disciples, and from his disciples to each other and to the world.

Paul's focus here and in the following verses is on God: on God's call and on God's design. He has already insisted on the universal scope of God's loving will, declaring that 'one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all' (5:18). However, to be effective God's design requires our response in faith (our 'love'). It is effective 'for all who believe' (3:22), for 'the one who has the faith of Jesus' (3:26), and so Paul is especially addressing those whom he described in the opening sentence as 'you who are called to belong to Jesus the Messiah' (1:6).

Romans 8:29-30

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined ['fore-ordained'] to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Once we realised that God does not exist in time, words like 'fore-know' (προγινωσκω) and 'predestine' (προορίζω) must be understood as referring to ontological priority, not temporal. It is God's purpose which is foundational and it is this to which Paul is drawing attention. It is God's knowing of us that enables our knowing of God.

The word 'knowing' carries with it all the intimacy of its use in the Scriptures where it refers to the knowledge that comes through communion in love.

It is this kind of knowledge of which God speaks when he says of Abraham: 'I have known (yadāh) him' (Genesis 18:19); and when he says to Jeremiah: 'I knew you' (Jeremiah 1:5); and to Israel: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth' (Amos 3:2).

Recall Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'Anyone who loves God is known by him' (1 Corinthians 8:3). Recall also Paul's words to the Galatians: 'Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again?' (Galatians 4:9).

Prior to any response we might or might not make, God's design for us is that we 'be conformed to the image of his Son'. This is what 'God decreed (προορίζω) before the ages for our glory' (1 Corinthians 2:7). This is already happening as 'we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Corinthians 3:18). Paul is referring to 'the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Corinthians 4:4). We will only be fully 'conformed' to Christ when we are united with him in the life of the resurrection, of which life he is the 'firstborn'.

This is God's design, born of his love. It is to this fullness of communion in love, the communion experienced by the risen Jesus, that we are called. It is no wonder that we hear Paul 'urging and encouraging and pleading' with the Thessalonians: 'that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory' (1 Thessalonians 2:12). 'For this purpose he called you ... so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus the Messiah' (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

Having called us, God offers us his Spirit, the communion of love which he shares with the risen Jesus. If we welcome this gift in faith, we will be drawn into Jesus' communion and so find ourselves in the relationship with God that God intends for us (we will, in the terms of this letter, be 'justified'). As we have just observed, we begin to share in the glory of God as we are transformed into Christ. We will experience it to the full when we, too, have passed through death and are taken up with Jesus into glory.

Romans 8:31-32

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Paul is confident because God ‘gave up his own Son for all of us’. He is echoing what he wrote earlier of God ‘sending his own Son’ (8:3); ‘God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us’ (5:8).

God gave us Jesus to reveal his love, risking him to our sinful rejection. It is this loving divine initiative which gives Paul the confidence that, having given his own Son, God will give us everything we need to be faithful to his grace and to resist anything that could bring about our condemnation.

Romans 8:33-36

Who will bring any charge against God's elect? Is it God who justifies? Then who is to condemn? Is it the Messiah Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who will separate us from the love of the Messiah? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered' (Psalm 44:23).

Paul has already spoken of Jesus' Spirit interceding for us (8:26-27). Here we see the exalted Jesus acting as our mediator with God.

Paul lists the forces that are powerless to separate us from 'the love of the Messiah.'

Romans 8:37-39

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who is loving us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in the Messiah Jesus our Lord.

Paul now widens his perspective. What about the powerful cosmic forces that affect our lives? Can these separate us from God's love in Christ? He uses contrasting pairs to cover the whole range of reality. Death cannot separate us from this love. 'In the Messiah Jesus' we have been set free from its dominion (see 8:2).

Whatever power super-terrestrial creatures may have, they have no power to separate us from God's love in Jesus.

With this hymn to God's love, Paul concludes his presentation of the essence of the gospel, for the proclamation of which he was called to be an apostle (see 1:1).