

THE GOSPEL OF THE PROMISED SEED IN ROMANS: TRANSFORMATION FOR DESIGNATION UNTO INHERITANCE

by John Pester

To what end does Paul's Epistle to the Romans serve the believers today? In Luther's hand during the Reformation, it was used to define and defend the truth of justification by faith in contrast to justification based on works. In many respects it still serves this function today, as witnessed by this thematic emphasis in many commentaries and outlines of Romans. However, within the gospel of God in Romans, there are things which remain in need of establishment, because the work of the recovery of truth that began in the Reformation remains incomplete before God. And until the full content of this gospel is proclaimed, appreciated, and experienced by the believers, the very goal of the gospel in Romans will remain unfulfilled.

Much of what is proclaimed concerning the gospel in Romans is not contrary to the teaching of Paul (16:17); it is simply deficient, lacking in completeness, and therefore, limited in its ability to convey the encouragement of the Scriptures that can give us hope, the specific hope that is at the center of Romans (15:4). The truth of justification by faith has enabled many to obtain access into the grace of God, and for this we ever must be thankful, but there is little boasting because of the hope of the glory of God, which is the end of justification (5:2). And without the hope that comes from the God of hope, there is little joy and enjoyment of our promised inheritance (15:13). Rather than living in the realm of righteousness, peace, and joy (14:17), most genuine believers, even though they possess the seed of the promise, are living utterly wretched lives, having become like Sodom and having been made like Gomorrah (9:8, 29).

This disconnect between the vital content of the gospel and the living of the believers is not due to a shortage of power in the gospel (1:16) or even a shortage in the heart and desire of every genuine believer to grow and mature (15:14). It is primarily due to a shortage in understanding the revelation of the mystery that has been manifested and made known (16:25-26). Without such an understanding, there is an utter shortage in our ability to remind the believers of and bring them into the reality and progressive experience of the grace that has been given to us by God (15:15). The church must recognize, address, and overcome this shortage in order to be established according to the contents of the gospel of God (16:25). And for this we must strive together in prayer, serve in our regenerated spirit, and minister Christ Jesus (15:30), who is the intrinsic content of the gospel.

The Gospel of God in Romans

It is clear in Paul's introduction to Romans that the gospel of God is the subject matter before him (1:1), and he immediately defines the content of the gospel in the following verses. The gospel of God concerns a person, but not an ordinary person; it concerns one "who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (vv. 3-4). Despite the clarity in Paul's utterance, commentaries and

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outlines¹ often fail to see the significance of these verses in the ensuing chapters of Romans. Searching instead for other motifs to define the theme of Romans and drawing from the Reformation emphasis on justification by faith, these commentaries often cite verses 16 and 17, which also refer to the gospel of God, as the thematic crux of the Epistle:² “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes, both to Jew first and to Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in it out of faith to faith, as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall have life and live by faith.’”

Rather than describing the content of the gospel, however, these verses describe the impact and ultimate issue of the gospel—salvation. This salvation, however, should not be narrowly understood. It is not limited to forgiveness of sins, imputation of righteousness, reconciliation to God, personal sanctification, or even living in ethical relationships.³ These are primarily objective accomplishments based on Christ’s redemptive death on the cross. They are the base and starting point of a salvation that will issue forth from the operation of the resurrection life of the Triune God (5:10). This life, operating in the realm of righteousness and faith, conveys the power of God, and this power is unto salvation.

Salvation in Romans involves the fulfillment of the promise given by God to Abraham, a promise of organic seed, which, when designated according to the transforming power of the resurrection life, will fulfill His desire for image through organic constitution and dominion through organic inheritance (vv. 17-19).⁴ The gospel in Romans is not a gospel of the forgiveness of sins but a gospel of a promised seed, a seed that is designated through transformation unto inheritance. And at the center of this gospel, as the very content of the gospel, there is a designated God-man, who is imparting His very life and nature into many sons to form the Body of Christ, which is involved in the same glorious process of designation.⁵ The first four verses in Romans unveil the designated Son of God as the content of the gospel, and they foreshadow the theme of the believers’ designation that unfolds throughout the remainder of the Epistle:

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The believers’ designation is predicated upon a process of designation that Jesus Christ our Lord first undertook on our behalf. This process is encapsulated in several key words, including *promised*, *seed*, *flesh*, *designated*, *Son of God*, *Spirit of holiness*, and *resurrection*. The gospel begins with a promise of seed. The fulfillment of the promise was *initiated* with the incarnation of divinity into humanity, producing a seed in the flesh in the person of Christ. “The gospel of God concerns the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. This wonderful person has two natures—the divine nature (v. 4) and the human nature (v. 3), divinity and humanity” (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:3, note 1). The human nature of Christ, which was assumed at the incarnation, is implied by *the seed of David*. “By incarnation, the first step of Christ’s process, God was brought into humanity” (Note 4).⁶

The fulfillment of the promise was *accomplished* by the designation of the humanity of Christ as divinity, the Son of God, on the day of His resurrection. Designation implies marking out. On the day of His resurrection, according to the Spirit of holiness, the humanity of Christ was sanctified by the divine essence of Christ, God the Spirit Himself.

Before His incarnation Christ, the divine One, already was the Son of God (John 1:18; Rom. 8:3). By incarnation He put on an element, the human flesh, which had nothing to do with divinity; that part of Him needed to be sanctified and uplifted by passing through

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death and resurrection. By resurrection His human nature was sanctified, uplifted, and transformed. Hence, by resurrection He was designated the Son of God with His humanity (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5). His resurrection was His designation. Now, as the Son of God, He possesses humanity as well as divinity. By incarnation He brought God into man; by resurrection He brought man into God, that is, He brought His humanity into the divine sonship. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:4, note 1)

After the fall, sinful humanity was incapable of being in union with divinity, even though this was God's implicit desire in creating humanity in His image and likeness. Having fallen short of the glory of God, humanity was separated from divinity because of the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. In the person of Christ, however, divinity was joined with humanity. In His incarnation, the Son came in the likeness of the flesh of sin. And He came *concerning sin*, that is, to remove the separating barrier between God and man, between divinity and humanity, by His work on the cross. As a God-man, He is the place of propitiation, the place where God and redeemed humanity can meet through faith in His blood (3:25). In His incarnation and human living, He was the complete God and perfect man. He was tempted in all respects like us, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15), because He lived the human life by the divine life (John 6:57). In resurrection, Christ, still possessing divinity but now also humanity, was declared and affirmed to be the Son of God in both His divinity and humanity. The perfect humanity of Christ, having passed every test and having satisfied the righteous requirement of God, was divinized in resurrection. The only begotten Son in incarnation became the firstborn Son in resurrection, the designated prototype for the many sons who are of the faith of Christ.

Having presented a designated God-man as the content of the gospel, Paul thematically develops this gospel and applies it to the believers throughout Romans. "We too will be designated and revealed as the sons of God, as He was in the glory of His resurrection (8:19, 21), and with Him we will express God" (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:4, note 1).

God's full salvation is to make sinners (3:23), even His enemies (5:10), the sons of God (8:14). Through resurrection God designated Christ, who became flesh to be the seed of David, as His Son, that His Son, who is the mingling of divinity and humanity, might be the base and pattern for His making sinners His many sons. It is in the resurrection of His Son, i.e., in the resurrected Son, that God is producing many sons (1 Pet. 1:3) as the many brothers of the Firstborn (8:29), who was resurrected from the dead, and as the members of His Firstborn to constitute the Body of His Firstborn (12:5), which is His fullness (Eph. 1:23), His corporate expression. (Note 2)

Just as Christ is the seed of the promise, the believers, as children of the promise, are accounted as seed (9:8). As vessels of mercy and in God's sovereign arrangement, the believers are joined to and identified with the seed of the promise by being grafted into Christ (11:17), and thus have a right of inheritance, having been prepared before unto glory (9:23, 26). The fulfillment of the promise in the believers is *initiated* with the regeneration of the human spirit with the divine life of the Triune God: "The spirit is life because of righteousness" (8:10). In regeneration, the divinity of the designated God-man, even Christ Himself (v. 10), is brought into humanity. The process of the believers' designation, however, requires the growth and development of this divine seed, including transformation in our soul and the redemption of our physical body. The fulfillment of the promise in the believers will be *accomplished* by our designation as sons of God on the day of the redemption of our body. The day of redemption is a day of resurrection (Eph. 1:14; 4:30; 1 Cor. 15:51-53), and it will be a day of manifestation and inheritance (Rom. 8:17-21). In resurrection and through resurrection, the believers will be designated as sons of God through the operation of the divine life, as revealed in chapter eight: The divine life in the Spirit (v. 2) becomes

life in our spirit through regeneration (v. 10). Then from our spirit it saturates our mind

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for the transformation of our soul, to which our mind belongs, and becomes the life in our soul (v. 6). Eventually, it will permeate our body and become the life in our body (v. 11), ultimately issuing in the transfiguration of our body (Phil. 3:21), that is, the redemption of our body (v. 23). (Recovery Version, note 3)

Designation is a process of life, beginning with the promise of the seed and advancing through our experience of the transforming power of the divine life contained in the seed.

The Promise of the Seed

The gospel that was promised in the holy Scriptures is concerned more with seed than with sins.⁷ The gospel that was preached to Abraham was the gospel of a promised seed, not merely the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, and the gospel that produced justifying faith in Abraham was a gospel of a seed unto inheritance, not merely a gospel of justification by faith. Given the Reformed emphasis on the judicial imputation of God's righteousness, however, it is not surprising that the term *seed* has received little notice as a central point in this Epistle.⁸ But it is precisely the inclusion of *seed* in Paul's discussion of justification in chapter four and selection in chapter nine that is so striking and that should give us pause to reconsider the role that the promise of seed plays in the gospel of God.⁹ In both of these chapters, Paul does not speak of seed in order to buttress objective doctrines but instead to demonstrate the organic nature of the promise as it relates to Christ and to the believers.

The Seed in Chapter Four

In Romans 3:21—5:11 Paul unveils the reality of justification, first by defining it in 3:21-31, then by presenting Abraham as an example of justification in 4:1-25, and finally, by showing the result of justification in 5:1-11. In discussing the definition and result of justification, Paul simply declares accomplished facts: God is righteous (3:21-22, 26); all have sinned (v. 23); Christ, as a propitiatory sacrifice, has redeemed (vv. 24-25; 5:6-8); and the believers have been justified by faith in Christ and have peace toward God (3:24, 26, 28; 5:1, 9-11). In presenting the example of Abraham in chapter four, however, the mode of his discourse changes from declaratory to analytical, even polemical, because more is at stake than just an understanding of the procedure of God's justification. For Paul, what is at stake is the fulfillment of God's purpose according to His promise, which is an issue of God's justification of life (5:18).

It is commonly assumed that Paul merely is contrasting justification by faith with justification by works in chapter four. This is the Reformation emphasis. But this interpretation assumes that justification by faith versus justification by works is Paul's central concern in this chapter. I do not think that it is. A deeper consideration of the purpose of justification in Romans is warranted by Paul's emphasis on the promise of the seed in 4:13, 16, and 18.

In chapter four Paul speaks of works within the specific context of the works of the law, not within a generalized context of humanity's persistent efforts to please God through ethical behavior and self-improvement. With this background, it seems that the question he is addressing is whether or not association with and adherence to the Jewish law is the basis for receiving the promised blessing of God, not the basis for justification. His answer to this question is negative for several reasons. First, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, keeping the law is not a viable means for obtaining the promise, the end of which is glory (3:23). On the one hand, the weakness of our sinful flesh undermines any potential efficacy in the law as a means of establishing righteousness, and on the other hand, the law inherently lacks the divine life that alone produces glory (8:3; Gal. 3:21). Second, complete adherence to the law, even if it were possible, would annul God's promise: "For if those of the law are heirs, faith has been made void and the promise has been

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annulled” (Rom. 4:14). Even more, the nullification of the promise would also portend the nullification of the Promise-giver Himself if the blessing of Abraham could be gained by keeping the law: “If righteousness is through law, then Christ has died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). Simply put, the fulfillment of the promise of God depends solely upon the actions of God Himself. Finally, Paul points out that the promise of God precedes any association of the Jewish people with the law and, therefore, is not contingent upon the law (Rom. 4:10-12; cf. Gal. 3:17).

Paul also desires to show that the promise of God to Abraham extends to all of humanity, the extension of which is according to the principle of faith: “Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not of the Gentiles also? Yes, of the Gentiles also” (Rom. 3:29). For Paul, the promise of God is not limited to the realm of those who were given the law, because He is the one God of all humanity, who seeks praise and glory from all (1:21, 25): “If indeed God is one, who will justify the circumcision out of faith and the uncircumcision through faith” (3:30). The desire of God to bless, therefore, is not limited to the circumcision; it also extends to the uncircumcision (4:9). In order for God’s desire for many sons to be fulfilled, the uncircumcision must be included in the line of the divine seed (vv. 11, 16). With the divine seed in view, Paul presents the truth of justification by faith not because he desires to draw a doctrinal contrast to justification by works but because it is through faith that the believers have access into the promise of God and thus are positioned to receive and be joined to the promised seed, Christ.

The example of Abraham speaks of justification by faith in response to hearing God’s word concerning a seed (10:17). Paul even identifies this speaking as the gospel (Gal. 3:8), indicating that the content of the promised gospel is indeed the promised seed (Rom. 1:1-3). The faith that was reckoned as righteousness was not a faith that came in response to hearing about the forgiveness of sins but a faith that came in response to God’s promise of a seed who would be the heir of the world (4:13, 18). With regard to the promise of God concerning seed, Abraham was empowered by faith, “being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to do. Therefore also it was accounted to him as righteousness” (vv. 21-22).

In Gen. 15 Abraham’s being justified by God was not related to sin; rather, it was for the gaining of a seed to produce a kingdom that will inherit the world (v. 13). Likewise, this chapter indicates that justification is not merely for man to be delivered out of God’s condemnation, but even more for God to gain many sons (8:29-30) to constitute the one Body of Christ (ch. 12) as the kingdom of God (14:17) for the fulfillment of His purpose. The objective, positional justification covered in ch. 3 is related to redemption, through which man may be reconciled to God; the subjective, dispositional justification covered in ch. 4 is related to life, through which men may become heirs for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. (Recovery Version, 4:1, note 1)

In Paul’s discussion of the role of faith in justification, the promise of a seed for inheritance is significant because it points to the role of the operation of the divine life in the fulfillment of God’s purpose for image and dominion. It is for this reason that Paul speaks of “justification of life” in 5:18.

Justification is not an end in itself; it is for life. Through justification we have come up to the standard of God’s righteousness and correspond with it, so that now He can impart His life to us. Justification changes our outward position; life changes our inward disposition. Justification unto life indicates that life is the focus of this chapter and that the organic union of life is an issue of justification. (Recovery Version, note 2)

Having been justified according to the righteousness of God and having received the life of God, which is the source of our conformity to the image of Christ, the believers are positioned to be heirs of the world, exercising God’s authority. “Justification is for God’s

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chosen ones to inherit the world that they may exercise God's dominion on earth (Gen. 1:26)" (Recovery Version, Rom. 4:13, note 1). The promise of the seed in chapter four primarily speaks of the coming of Christ in His incarnation, but it also speaks of His coming into the believers as the Spirit of Christ, who operates in the believers as the law of the Spirit of life (8:9, 2). Thus, it foreshadows the aspect of the believers' identification in life with the seed of the promise. This identification and its central place in the purpose of God are developed in more detail in chapter nine.

The Seed in Chapter Nine

Although God's promise to Abraham primarily concerned Christ, within His speaking there was an indication that the seed would be corporate, that is, that it would comprise many sons in union with Christ and sharing in the divine life as a divine inheritance.¹⁰ Romans 4:16 says, "The inheritance is out of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise may be certain to all the seed, not to that which is of the law only, but also to that which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Paul develops the notion of "all the seed" in chapter nine when he shows that God's selection is related to the promise of sonship, not to the forgiveness of sins. From among all of humanity, God selected the believers with a view to His purpose, just as He chose between Jacob and Esau before they had been born or "had done anything good or bad" (9:11). Considerations of sin, to say nothing of considerations of good, did not enter into God's heart when He decided to have mercy on whom He would have mercy. His consideration was based on a desire for seed. Out from this desire, God made a promise: "Neither is it that because they are the seed of Abraham, they are all children; but, 'In Isaac shall your seed be called,' that is, it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are accounted as the seed" (vv. 7-8).

The seed is both Christ in His unique identity as a designated God-man and the designated believers who are joined to the Lord through His death and resurrection and who are being conformed to the image of the Firstborn.

By associating Abraham's seed with God's promise and then by drawing a clear distinction between Abraham's physical seeds, notably between Isaac and Ishmael in verse 8 and between Jacob and Esau in verse 13, it is clear that Paul's concept of seed is rooted in the fulfillment of a divine and mystical reality: "Not all who are out of Israel are Israel," and those who are not His people shall "be called sons of the living God" (vv. 6, 26). The believers' status as seed finds its source in the selection of the living God, who imparts His life as grace into vessels of mercy who are filled with the riches of the Triune God by believing into and calling upon the name of the Lord (11:5-6; 9:23; 10:10-13). Thus, despite the utter abandonment of God by humanity in general (1:18—3:20), there is a remnant reserved by God's sovereign selection of grace (11:5).¹¹

The selected seed in chapter nine is the promised seed in chapter four. The seed is both Christ in His unique identity as a designated God-man and the designated believers who are joined to the Lord through His death and resurrection and who are being conformed to the image of the Firstborn. Just this reality alone is worthy of our wonder and praise. Indeed, all things are "out from Him and through Him and to Him" (11:36). *All things*, however, speaks of something more, of inheritance, and our lofty inheritance is signaled by the specific appellation that Paul uses in conjunction with the term *seed*.

The Identity and Significance of the Promised Seed

In his description of the gospel of the promised seed, Paul specifically identifies the seed as *the seed of David* in Romans 1:3. Given his reliance upon the experience of Abraham to convey the reality of the promise of the seed in chapter four and the selection of the seed in chapter nine, it seems only logical that he would speak of the seed in Romans 1:3 as being the seed of Abraham. But he does not. And with good reason. In His selection and promise of seed, God has a purpose in view. He desires more than just children; He desires mature sons who, possessing the sonship, can fully express Him and governmentally administrate all things in Him and through Him. While the seed of Abraham

speaks of promise, faith, and righteousness, the seed of David speaks of sonship for the inheritance of all things and kingship for reigning in life.

The sequence of the identification of the seed in Romans, first as the seed of David in chapter one and then as the seed of Abraham in chapters four and nine, mirrors the sequence that is provided in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:1: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew’s genealogy is the genealogy of Christ as the King, proving that He is the rightful Inheritor of the throne of David. That Paul identifies Christ as the seed of David indicates that the primary significance of the seed in Romans is for sonship, inheritance, and kingship. He develops this matter by speaking of the believers’ reigning in life. The abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness which we have received through the seed, Jesus Christ, is for us to reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17). *Life* in verse 17 “refers to the eternal, divine, uncreated life of God (*zoe*), which is Christ Himself as life to us....This eternal life of God is the main element of the divine grace that has been given to us, and in this eternal life we can reign” (Recovery Version, note 4).

The life we have received does not merely save us from a few things; rather, it enthrones us as kings to reign over all things....We have received righteousness objectively, but we still need to continually receive the abundance of grace so that we can reign in life subjectively. This reigning is defined in chs. 6—16; all the matters expounded there are the issue not of our endeavoring but of our receiving the abundance of grace. (Note 3)

Reigning in life is the proof of our inheritance of the promise. This reigning aspect has been demonstrated and exhibited by Christ Jesus our Lord, whose divine lordship was conferred on His humanity when He was designated the Son of God in His humanity out from the resurrection of the dead. It will be demonstrated and exhibited by the justified believers who, as joint heirs with Christ, will be designated as the many sons of God through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life (8:17, 19, 2).

The Designation of the Seed

Romans 1:4 speaks of Christ as the designated seed, and in Romans 8:29, as a further development of the truth of Christ’s designation in His humanity as the Son of God, He is revealed as the Firstborn among many brothers. The many brothers are the believers, who, as Abraham’s seed, must pass through a similar process of designation. Romans 8 is devoted to a description of this process. Just as there were components of flesh and Spirit in Christ’s designation, there are components of flesh and Spirit in the believers’ experience of designation. Just as Christ was declared to be the Son of God not only in His divinity but also in His humanity, the believers will be declared to be sons of God not only in their humanity but also in their identification and union with Christ in His divinity. And just as Christ entered into a realm of glory and kingship out of the resurrection of the dead, the believers will enter into the same realm of glory and jointly inherit the kingship with Christ through the operation of the resurrection life of the Triune God.

Romans 8 reveals a tension between flesh and Spirit, each of which has the potential for serving as the source of the believers’ human living. In His incarnation, Christ in His divinity as the eternal Word put on humanity, coming in the likeness of the flesh of sin (v. 3). Even as a perfect man, however, He did not live according to His perfect human life; He lived by the divine life. He fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law by living according to this divine life, the resurrection life. On the day of His resurrection, the day of His designation, He entered into glory and manifested the vitality of the divine life that had served as the source of His human living. In many respects, the choice before Christ in the days of His flesh is the choice before us, that is, whether or not we will live by our fallen human life or whether we live by the divine life that we have received through regeneration.¹² If we live by the divine life, we will be progressively designated through

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transformation and ultimately be manifested in glory as sons of God. In this process, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us when we walk according to our regenerated human spirit rather than our flesh (v. 4). When our mind is set on the flesh, it minds the things of the flesh, but when it is set on the spirit, it minds the things of the Spirit (v. 5). And even though we can be in the condition and experience of our flesh, we also can be in the condition and experience of our human spirit, which is life because of righteousness, because the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of Christ and even Christ Himself, dwells in us to make our mind, the leading part of our soul, one with the divine life (vv. 8-10, 6). “So then, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh”; instead, we can put to death the practices of the body by the Spirit and live by the divine life (vv. 12-13).

As we live by the divine life, we are in the process of designation, maturing in this life and advancing from being children to sons to heirs. This is the essence of sonship. “This sonship began with the regeneration of our spirit, is continuing with the transformation of our soul, and will be consummated with the redemption of our body” (Recovery Version, v. 23, note 3). In our regenerated human spirit, the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (v. 16). And as we are led by the Spirit of God, having received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!, it will become manifest that we are the sons of God (vv. 14-15). The leading in verse 14 “is not merely an action of the Spirit. It is the Triune God Himself becoming the leading in our spirit. If we would care for Him as a person who indwells us, we will spontaneously be led by Him” (Recovery Version, note 2). This is a manifestation, a revelation, that all of creation eagerly awaits (v. 19). And “we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan in ourselves, eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body” (v. 23).

With the redemption of our bodies, we will be conformed to the image of the designated Son. This will be the consummation of the gospel of the promised seed, the purpose for which God made a selection of seed according to grace.

The central thought of the book of Romans is that God’s salvation makes sinners His sons, who have His life and nature so that they can express Him, that they may become members of Christ to constitute the Body of Christ for His expression. Hence, sonship is stressed in this chapter (vv. 15, 23). *Sons* here indicates a more advanced stage of growth in the divine life than does *children* in v. 16, yet not as advanced as *heirs* in v. 17. *Children* refers to the initial stage of sonship, the stage of regeneration in the human spirit. Sons are the children of God who are in the stage of the transformation of their souls. They not only have been regenerated in their spirit and are growing in the divine life, but they also are living and walking by being led by the Spirit. Heirs are the sons of God who, through the transfiguration of their body in the stage of glorification, will be fully matured in every part of their being. Hence, they will be qualified as the legal heirs to claim the divine inheritance (vv. 17, 23). (Recovery Version, v. 14, note 3)

With the redemption of our bodies, we, as the many brothers of the Firstborn, will be conformed to the image of the designated Son. This, in the believers’ experience, will be the consummation of the gospel of the promised seed, the purpose for which God made a selection of seed according to grace. In His image shining, in His divinity expressing, and in His position ruling and reigning, we, who have been predestinated, called, and justified, will be glorified through the process of designation.

With His firstborn Son as the base, pattern, element, and means, God is producing many sons, and the many sons who are produced are the many believers who believe into God’s firstborn Son and are joined to Him as one. They are exactly like Him in life and nature, and, like Him, they have both humanity and divinity. They are His increase and expression in order that they may express the eternal Triune God for eternity. (Recovery Version, v. 29, note 4)

The expression of God for eternity is the issue of our designation, but this hope, as Paul reminds us, is not a hope that is clearly seen in the midst of our weaknesses. We can easily see ourselves as wretched but not as easily see the coming glory. This is because

designation depends upon transformation, which involves our experience of the resurrection life that has been made available by our justification according to the righteousness of God. Consequently, even though Paul speaks of the designation of the seed in consummate terms in verse 29, he goes on to speak of our experience of transformation in Romans 12—16.

The Transformation of the Seed

Designation, as a process involving sanctification, transformation, conformation, and glorification, begins with the regeneration of our human spirit and consummates with the redemption of our body. Both of these stages of the process are instantaneous in their accomplishment. The intervening steps in the process occur as we walk by our regenerated and mingled human spirit, being led by the Spirit, and it involves the spreading of the divine life in our spirit into the faculties of our soul. The leading part of our soul, the mind, especially needs to be renewed with the divine life (12:2). This renewing is transformation.

The renewing of the mind, which results from setting the mind on the spirit (8:6), is the base for the transformation of our soul. Our mind is the leading part of our soul, and as it is renewed, our will and emotion automatically follow to be renewed also. To be renewed means that a new element is wrought into our being. This produces an inward metabolic transformation, making us suitable for the building up of the Body of Christ. (Recovery Version, v. 2, note 4)

If we desire to advance and be established and built up according to the divine realities contained in Paul's gospel (16:25), we must willingly present ourselves to God to be transformed (12:1-2). The extent to which we are transformed in this age is the extent to which we will advance in the process of designation, and the extent of our designation in this age is the extent to which the Lord will determine our reward in His millennial kingdom. The sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed upon the sons who will share in the coming kingdom (8:18). And these sufferings are certainly preferable to the weeping and gnashing of teeth that will emanate from believers who experience the dispensational punishment that God in His righteousness will decree at the judgment seat of Christ because they were conformed to the present, stupefying age rather than to Christ, being unwilling to suffer with Him (v. 17).

Chapter eight speaks of the believers being conformed to the image of Christ, and chapter twelve speaks of not being conformed to the present age. The level of our conformation in both cases is determined by the extent of our transformation. Romans 12 thus begins with Paul's urgent exhortation for the believers to present themselves to God with a view to being transformed. His exhortation is based on the compassions that God showed toward us in His merciful selection, calling, and impartation of the divine life. The designated seed of eternity future in chapter eight, even though it is revealed as the selected seed in eternity past in chapters nine through eleven, must still become a transformed seed in this age, as revealed in chapters twelve through sixteen.

I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect. (12:1-2)

Paul refers to a *living sacrifice* because of the central importance of the divine life in the process of transformation. The sacrifice is living because "it has life through resurrection; it is not like the sacrifices in the Old Testament, which were all slain"; it is holy because it is being "sanctified and transformed by the Holy Spirit with God's life and God's holy nature for God's satisfaction" (Recovery Version, v. 1, note 5). Transformation, therefore, is

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not an outward change in our behavior through self-effort. Having begun our Christian life by the Spirit regenerating our human spirit, we cannot be perfected by efforts of the flesh. Rather, we need to be open to the continuing operation of the divine life, which has the innate, organic ability to transform us and constitute us a living sacrifice to God.

Transformation is the inward, metabolic process in which God works to spread His divine life and nature throughout every part of our being, particularly our soul, bringing Christ and His riches into our being as our new element and causing our old, natural element to be gradually discharged. As a result, we will be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18), that is, conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God as His many brothers (8:29). Thus we will be suitable for the building up of His Body. (Recovery Version, v. 2, note 3)

The divine, eternal life of God cannot be separated from the Triune God Himself. “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:12). The life that was imparted into the believers at their regeneration, which is the Triune God Himself, is the very source of our transformation. This life must spread within each of the believers individually. But if transformation is genuinely sourced in the divine life, it will be manifested corporately as one sacrifice. This is because transformation is ultimately unto our conformation to the one image of His Son.

In Greek, *bodies* [in Romans 12:1] is plural and *sacrifice* is singular. This indicates that, although many bodies are presented, they become one sacrifice, implying that, although we are many, our service in the Body of Christ should not be many individual services, separated and unrelated. All our service should constitute one whole service, and this service must be unique because it is the service of the one Body of Christ. (Recovery Version, v. 1, note 5)

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Transformation is exhibited by a renewed mind that is in the service of the Body of Christ. A renewed mind exhibits certain characteristics that cannot be produced by the self-effort of a believer who is motivated by the natural and unrenewed mind. Of the many characteristics mentioned by Paul in the final four chapters of Romans, some of the more significant include functioning as a member in the Body of Christ and encouraging others to function according to one’s apportioned measure of faith for the building up of the Body, communicating to the needs of the saints, submitting to authorities, receiving the believers according to God’s receiving, and living in and for the oneness of the Body of Christ both universally and locally. All of these characteristics are directed toward the manifestation of that which proves the will of God, which is Christ as the Head and the church as His Body. These are issues of life, not of work.

A believer with a renewed mind is one who does not think more highly of himself than he ought to think (v. 3). Such thinking is rooted in a sober-mindedness that cannot be displayed by one whose mind is set on high things and who cannot go along with the lowly (v. 16). A renewed mind is able to soberly assess and appreciate not only that which it lacks but also that which other members of the Body possess, and thus it encourages the members to function according to their apportioned measure of faith. Such an assessment does not derive from an analytical evaluation of others’ abilities and dispositions; it comes out of an intrinsic realization, borne by experience, that all the members do not have the same function, each differing according to the grace that has been given (vv. 4, 6). A renewed mind allows practical matters of service and faith to “pass through its hand”; that is, it does not regard anything of this life as worthy of being grasped or selfishly hoarded (Phil. 2:5-6). Consequently, a renewed mind does not despise the brothers; instead, it honors and provides encouragement in love without hypocrisy (Rom. 14:10; 12:9-10).

If we are to have the proper church life, the first thing that must be torn down is the high esteem that we have for ourselves, that we may think so as to be sober-minded. This requires that our mind be renewed by having all the negative elements within it swallowed

up by the life of Christ. Then we will esteem ourselves according to the faith that God has apportioned to us, that is, according to the measure of God's element that has been transfused into us. (Recovery Version, v. 3, note 1)

A believer with a renewed mind communicates to the needs of the saints. This involves materially sharing what we have been given by the Lord. This kind of sharing is not parsimonious in its consideration of need; it is a reflection of a mind that pursues hospitality (v. 13). "This is to care willingly for the needs of the saints according to our ability...In the sharing of material things the grace of the Lord's life flows among the members of the Body of Christ and is infused into them" (Recovery Version, v. 13, note 1). To give occasionally to the needs of the saints is one thing; to pursue the amelioration of such needs continuously is another matter altogether.

A renewed mind submits to authorities, all authorities, not because it recognizes outward causal obligations but because it is submissive in nature (13:1-7). "Man's natural character is rebellious, but a transformed character is submissive. Subjection to authority requires transformation, which results from the growth in life" (Recovery Version, v. 1, note 2). Transformation, the flowing of the divine life, deals with our rebellious, fallen nature and joins the believers to the mind of Christ, a mind that knows God, glorifies God, and thanks God in its recognition of God's ordination (vv. 1-2). There is submission in all relationships and circumstances: taxes are given to whom taxes are due, custom to whom custom is due, fear to whom fear is due, and honor to whom honor is due (v. 7). This submission extends to all human relationships because a transformed mind does not submit on the basis of personal preferences but on the basis of seeing and recognizing God's ordination. And within the Body of Christ, there is submission one to another (Eph. 5:21) not on the basis of the hierarchal notions that plague the church today but on the basis of the recognition of function between members who are of the same mind toward one another (Rom. 15:5).

A renewed mind receives all the believers on the basis of Christ's receiving (v. 7). This is not done with a view to passing judgment on one's considerations but in love because Christ has received him (14:1, 15; 15:7). In regard to the items of the faith, there is steadfastness (16:17), but as to minor doctrinal matters, especially matters of practice, there is generality, acceptance, and liberty of conscience (14:2-5).

To practice the Body life revealed in ch. 12, we must learn the practical lessons of receiving the believers, as revealed particularly in 14:1—15:13, that the church life may be all-inclusive, able to include all kinds of genuine Christians. Such receiving requires the transformation mentioned in ch. 12; if we remain natural, we will be unable to receive those whose views are different from ours in doctrine or in practice. (Recovery Version, v. 1, note 2)

With such a receiving, the work of God is not torn down; rather, there is a pleasing of one another that is good for building up, and with one accord and one mouth the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified (14:20; 15:2, 6). Even our receiving of one another is to the glory of God, being expressed in the reality of the kingdom as righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (v. 7; 14:17). Thus, our receiving displays not only the transforming power of the resurrection life of the Triune God; it also displays the Triune God Himself. Our transformed participation in this display or lack thereof will be a central item of accounting that will be considered at the judgment seat of Christ (v. 12).

A renewed mind, which recognizes fellow believers as members and attends to their needs with a submissive and accepting heart, is a mind that above all cares for the oneness of the Body of Christ in both its universal and local aspects. All of these transformed characteristics are placed in consecrated service as a unique testimony of the one work and will of our Triune God. The oneness of the Body is a matter that must be proved by testing (12:2). The universal oneness of the Body is proved and tested locally

A renewed mind, which recognizes fellow believers as members and attends to their needs with a submissive and accepting heart, is a mind that above all cares for the oneness of the Body of Christ in both its universal and local aspects.

(16:1, 5). A local expression of the one Body cannot be organized; it is an issue of an organic impulse that begins with a deep consecration (12:1), a consecration that allows the Lord to deal with every impediment to our participation, in one accord, in the mystery that has been manifested. For Paul, a local church testifies of the oneness of the Body of Christ through its receiving of all the believers and through its utter refusal to participate in divisions of any form (16:17). Such a local church, as the transformed and designated seed, crushes Satan under its feet (v. 20), administering God's judgment on His enemy and fulfilling the prophetic mission foretold of the woman's seed in Genesis 3:15.

The Establishment of the Seed according to Paul's Gospel

Paul ends his Epistle as he began—by referring to the gospel. Rather than speaking of it generally as “the gospel of God,” however, he personalizes it, speaking of it as “my gospel” (Rom. 1:1; 16:25). His personalization springs forth from a deep realization that his gospel, like his calling, has its source in the Triune God, and, more importantly, that God desires to establish the believers according to the intrinsic contents of his gospel. Paul's gospel is a proclamation of Jesus Christ, the designated God-man, and it reveals the mystery that was kept in silence in the times of the ages but which was revealed subsequently as a promise in the prophetic writings. This gospel reveals the promise of designated seed, a mystery that simply is lacking in the gospel of justification by faith alone.

Luther's insight was necessary to begin to recover the contents of Paul's gospel, but much of what he spoke has been systematized and reduced to a formulaic dictum that conveys little of the power of God and almost none of the deep mystery of the gospel.

Luther's insight into this truth surely was necessary to begin to recover the contents of Paul's gospel, but much of what he spoke has been systematized and reduced to a formulaic dictum that conveys little of the power of God and almost none of the deep mystery of the gospel. In its Reformed emphasis, the gospel has been reduced effectively to justification by faith alone. While this truth, spoken in conjunction with Christ's redemptive death on the cross, is sufficient to reconcile sinners to God, that is about all that it can do. When one considers this as the content of the gospel, where is the mystery in viewing God as a Judge, objectively accounting our belief in Christ as a righteous response that can appease His wrath? Where is the mystery in the unproductive thrust in pastoral exhortations rooted in a forensic gospel to objectively keep the commandments following our justification? And where is the mystery of the church that many, at best, objectively regard as a “body,” a group, of believers and, at worst, regard as a material structure?

When one considers the content of Paul's gospel, however, there is mystery in the promised seed who is the mingling of divinity with humanity and who, even in His humanity, has been designated as the Son of God out from the resurrection of the dead, being fully deified in His humanity. There is mystery in the believers being joined to this seed, based on an eternal selection of grace and then passing through a process that will culminate in their designation as sons of God through the operation of the divine life, being fully deified in their humanity. And there is mystery in the believers, as the church, becoming the organic counterpart of Christ through the transformation of the seed from individualistic sinners to sons to constitute the one organic Body of Christ. What God can establish is determined by what we speak. A deficient gospel, lacking in understanding and emphasis on the promised seed, limits the power of God: for this we need to repent, and in the obedience of faith we need to establish the things which remain so that our able God can establish the believers according to the content of His gospel of promised seed. ■^{AC}

Notes

¹The extent to which the revelation of humanity's sinfulness, God's righteousness, Christ's redemption, and the believers' justification by faith dominates much of the discourse on Romans can be seen in thematic descriptions and outlines of the contents of Romans. The respected Scofield Reference Bible correlates the theme of Romans to the gospel of God, which, in its “very widest possible designation” is “the whole body of redemption truth” (1191). However, it then circumscribes the boundary of this “whole body” of truth to the solitary item of redemption,

albeit one that is “revealed as wide as the need, upon the alone condition of faith” (1191). The Ryrie Study Bible declares that “Romans sets forth the doctrine of justification by faith (and its ramifications) in a systematic way,” and it identifies the theme of the Epistle as being the righteousness of God (1593). Although it points to a “number of basic Christian doctrines,” including natural revelation, universality of sin, justification, propitiation, faith, original sin, union with Christ, the election and rejection of Israel, spiritual gifts, and respect for government, the influence of the suggested theme clearly dominates its outline of Romans (1593):

I. Salutation and Statement of Theme, 1:1-17; II. Righteousness Needed; Condemnation, Sin, 1:18—3:20; III. Righteousness Imputed; Justification, Salvation, 3:21—5:21; IV. Righteousness Imparted; Sanctification, Separation, 6:1—8:39; V. Righteousness Vindicated; Dispensation, Sovereignty, 9:1—11:36; VI. Righteousness Practiced; Application, Service, 12:1—15:13; VII. Personal Messages and Benediction, 15:14—16:27. (1593-1594)

The Lindsell Study Bible states that “Paul presents, in orderly fashion, the essential elements of the gospel, having for its central motif the concept of salvation (justification) by faith alone without good works” (232). Quoting the Living Bible’s paraphrase of Romans 1:16, the Good News is declared to be “God’s powerful method of bringing all who believe it to heaven” (232). In its presentation of the central motif, salvation is equated to justification, and the description of salvation conforms more to traditional notions of going to heaven than to the salvation in Romans that enables sinners to become sons of God, fully mature and inheriting the promised position and place of sons, based on conformity to the image of the Firstborn through the processes of sanctification, transformation, and glorification. It merely says, “Jesus Christ is man’s only hope; by his death and resurrection, through faith in him, heaven’s doors are opened for redeemed men to enter in. The grace (that is, the favor) of God is freely offered” (232).

The outline of Romans in the New Geneva Study Bible, which claims to present the essence of Reformation theology, closely follows the insights and emphasis of Luther in regard to the central role of God’s righteousness in the justification of the believers:

I. Paul’s Greetings and Personal Introduction (1:1-15); II. Theme: The Righteousness of God for Jew and Gentile (1:16, 17); III. Mankind’s Universal Sinfulness (1:18—3:20); IV. God’s Righteousness for Justification (3:21—5:21); V. Grace Reigns Through God’s Righteousness (chs. 6—8); VI. God Demonstrates His Righteousness in Jew and Gentile (chs. 9—11); VII. God’s Righteousness Grasped and Expressed in His People’s Lives (12:1—15:13); VIII. Paul’s Plans and Concluding Greetings (15:14—16:27). (1765)

Two respected commentators, Frederic L. Godet, who published in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and John Stott of more contemporary evangelical circles, show the pervasive limitation of the scope of the gospel to matters related to the objective matters of righteousness, justification, and faith. Godet states,

Before entering on the development of his subject, the apostle *expounds* it in a few lines, which are, as it were, the *theme* of the entire treatise. This summary is contained in vv. 16, 17. The apostle proposes to show that the salvation of every man, whoever he may be, rests on the *righteousness which faith procures*; he supports this proposition immediately by a scripture declaration. (59)

“Paul’s two main themes,” according to Stott, are “the integrity of the gospel committed to him [salvation given *sola gratia*, by grace alone] and the solidarity of Jews and Gentiles in the messianic community” (36). Both Godet’s and Stott’s works are serious attempts to bring understanding to the gospel presented by Paul in Romans. Much less impressive is the focus contained in Robert Schuler’s New Possibility Thinkers Bible, which attempts to mold the message of Romans to fit a personal philosophy rooted in self-help and self-motivation for the purpose of self-improvement, the very antithesis of the gospel of God in Romans. Nevertheless, even this effort attempts to ground its views in a theology of justification by faith. Concerning Romans, the New Possibility Thinkers Bible states,

Sometimes called “Paul’s testament,” Romans presents a beautifully detailed doctrinal statement of Christianity. Paul presents the need for all people to realize their position before God—one which falls short of God’s glorious design and plan for their lives. But by an

Salvation often is equated to justification, and descriptions of salvation conform more to traditional notions of going to heaven than to the salvation that enables sinners to become sons of God, inheriting the promised position of sons.

The process of making sinners sons is a process of designation. The issue of this process—mature sons who are constituted as the Body of Christ—is a proof of the believers’ designation as inheritors of the world, displaying God’s image and His dominion.

act of God’s grace and by faith, people are restored to their rightful relationship with God. Because of the confidence of forgiveness, all believers can present their talents, gifts, and abilities—whatever they are—as an act of worship to God. The exhortations of Paul in Romans are practical directions for living a life justified by the grace of Jesus Christ. (1331)

²Godet argues from this perspective in his commentary. Regarding verses 16 and 17 as the true summary, he discounts the significance of verses 3 and 4. The basis for this discounting, however, has little to do with the revelation that Paul presents in Romans and more to do with considerations of style and composition:

The intention of the passage, vv. 3, 4, has been strangely misunderstood. Some say: it is a summary of the gospel doctrine which the apostle means to expound in this treatise. But a summary is not stated in an address. The true summary of the Epistle, besides, is found in i. 17. Finally, *christological* doctrine is precisely one of the heads, the absence of which is remarkable in our Epistle. (81)

While summaries may not be a commonly recognized stylistic element in a salutatory address, to state that this is the case in Romans is to ignore Paul’s clear utterance that the promised gospel in verses 1 and 2 *concerns* the designated Son of God in verses 3 and 4. And in fact, christological doctrine concerning the person (vv. 3-4; 5:15; 8:3) and work of Christ in the days of His flesh (3:24-25; 4:25; 5:8) and in His resurrection as the Spirit (8:2, 9) is at the center of Paul’s thought.

Having discounted these verses as the content of the gospel, Godet is forced to rhetorically ask, “But why put these reflections on the person of Christ in the address, and between what Paul says of his apostleship in general (vv. 1, 2), and what he afterward adds regarding his apostleship to the Gentiles in particular (vv. 5, 6)?” (81). His response is inadequate in its suggestion that Paul speaks of the process of designation through resurrection in order to show that the “wholly new work” of Paul’s apostleship depended upon Jesus being “set free from the form of Jewish nationality and the bond of theocratic obligations,” a transformation which was wrought “in His person by His death and resurrection” (81). Such an explanation, however, makes the formation of Paul’s apostleship to the Gentiles the focus of the person and work of Christ in His incarnation, death, and resurrection.

³As the outlines from the New Geneva Study Bible and the Ryrie Study Bible indicate, it is entirely possible to view the matters of sanctification in Romans 6—8 and transformation in Romans 12—15 from the standpoint of personal, spiritual pursuit and of living in ethical relationships that show forth righteousness.

⁴In Romans 5:17-19, the accomplishment of God’s stated intention for humanity, that of image and dominion (Gen. 1:26), is succinctly presented within the context of justification. However, Paul’s view of justification in these verses is not limited to judicial considerations, as this justification is “of life.” It is important to view these verses within their organic context:

For if by the offense of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will *reign in life* through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was through one righteous act unto *justification of life* to all men. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were *constituted* sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be *constituted* righteous (emphasis added).

Justification is of life for the purpose of exercising God’s dominion by reigning in life in union with the One, Jesus Christ, who is God’s image. This union involves constitution, a making in life and nature that involves appointment just as the maturity of the children of God positions them to participate in their inheritance as sons of God. The abundance of grace is the source of image, and the gift of righteousness is the base for dominion.

⁵This thought is more succinctly conveyed by Witness Lee in his outline of the Epistle to the Romans, which lists the subject as being “The gospel of God—to make sinners sons of God to constitute the Body of Christ, which is expressed as the local churches” (601). The process of making sinners sons is a process of designation. The issue of this process—mature sons who are constituted as the Body of Christ—is a proof of the believers’ designation as inheritors of the world, displaying both God’s image and His dominion (Rom. 4:13; 8:29; 16:20). And the reality,

vitality, and practicality of this process of designation are seen in local churches as they are biblically revealed in Romans 16.

⁶While the description of the two natures of Christ appears self-evident from the plain words of the text, this view has its share of detractors. The New Geneva Study Bible, for example, states that these verses are

a description of the two stages of the Savior's ministry, rather than of His two natures. Although Son of God, He was "born of the seed of David" in order to share our weakness, but was transformed by the "Spirit of holiness" at the Resurrection, and was brought into a new epoch of His personal human existence (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 13:4). (1766)

Much of the difficulty in regarding these verses as a christological statement is related to the term *Son of God*, which, in the context of Romans 1:3-4, seems to suggest that Jesus was not the Son of God prior to His resurrection. But since all believers confidently and correctly affirm that Jesus is the only Begotten from the Father (John 1:14), these verses seem problematic from a christological perspective. To skirt this possibility, various explanations are offered, such as Geneva's assertion that these verses refer to two stages of Christ's ministry. But such evasions, perhaps out of a concern to not appear to undermine the orthodox understanding of the two natures of Christ, are not very convincing. This is especially ironic since there is nothing in verses 3 and 4 that does damage to a proper understanding of the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ. In incarnation, God was manifested in the flesh, the divinity of the only Begotten was mingled with the humanity of the seed of David, but without confusion and without producing a third substance. The divinity of Christ was truly divine, that is, it was not human, and the humanity of Christ was truly human, that is, it was not divine. Nevertheless, in the person of Christ, divinity mysteriously was mingled with humanity. In the resurrection, however, the humanity of Jesus was uplifted, elevated, and designated as the Son of God; that is, it was marked out as being divine in its own right. Thus, God became man in order to make man God. In resurrection, the humanity of Christ was deified.

Godet's discussion of Christ's status in verses 3 and 4 is primarily positional; his attention is focused on Christ's condescension, His emptying of Himself in His taking the form of a slave and being found in fashion as a man (Phil. 2:7-8), and His subsequent exaltation as a man (v. 9):

For the resurrection of Jesus not only manifested or demonstrated what He was; it wrought a real transformation in His mode of being....He was restored, and restored wholly—that is to say, with His human nature—to the position of Son of God which He had renounced on becoming incarnate. The thought of Paul is identical with that of the prayer of Jesus on the eve of His death, as we have it in John's Gospel (xvii. 5): "Father, glorify Thou me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." Jesus always *was* the Son:...At His resurrection He was re-established, and that as man, in His state of Sonship. (79)

Although Godet's observation is helpful in highlighting the position of Christ as both God and man, little is offered concerning the effect of incarnation and resurrection on His two natures. From the standpoint of His divinity, His change of position, His emptying of Himself, did not involve the putting off of His divinity. "In His incarnation the Lord did not alter His divine nature; He changed only His outward expression, from the form of God, the highest form, to that of a slave, the lowest form. This was not a change of essence but of state" (Recovery Version, Phil. 2:7, note 2). In incarnation, He did not put off divinity; rather, He assumed humanity in addition to the divinity that He eternally possesses; that is, He put on human nature. Godet correctly states that "Jesus always *was* the Son," but this is correct only as to His divinity.

⁷The word *seed* appears nine times in Romans: once in chapter one, three times in chapter four, four times in chapter nine, and once in chapter eleven.

⁸In some respects, the gospel of the promised blessing has been replaced by a gospel that speaks only of justification by faith alone. In effect, an accurate theological description of the process of justification has become, to some, the content of the gospel.

⁹Chapters four and nine of Romans largely have been limited to serving as proof texts for crucial, but objective, Reformed doctrines, including justification by faith and the believers' eternal

In the person of Christ, divinity mysteriously was mingled with humanity. In the resurrection, however, the humanity of Jesus was uplifted, elevated, and designated as the Son of God; that is, it was marked out as being divine in its own right.

The temptation that Christ daily faced and triumphed over, which we also daily face, was the temptation to not live by the divine life. He lived a life of denying His perfect human life, and we too must live a life of denying our fallen human life.

selection. The Pauline emphasis on seed augers for something more, something deeper, something organic in addition to the judicial.

¹⁰This is clearly seen in Galatians 3:16 and 29. In verse 16, the seed is emphatically presented as a singular seed: “He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as concerning many, but as concerning one: ‘And to your seed,’ who is Christ.” In verse 29, however, when speaking of the sons of God who have been baptized into Christ and who have put on Christ, Paul states, “If you are of Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.” In this verse, he does not speak of the many as being “Abraham’s seeds,” but as being one: “You are Abraham’s seed.” Thus, both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified for the purpose of inheritance are all of One (Heb. 2:11).

¹¹Just this one phrase, *according to the selection of grace*, which suggests that selection involves more than just an objective marking out in eternity past, is deserving of further consideration and much prayer.

¹²The choice of Christ, that of living according to His perfect human life rather than according to the divine life, does not seem to be on the same level as the choice before the believers, that of living according to the fallen human life rather than the divine life. Considered another way—and this is a matter I have often asked myself, not in the way of unbelief but, hopefully and prayerfully, in the way that seeks to know Him to live Him—How is it possible to positively affirm the biblical revelation that in His person Christ was only in the likeness of the flesh of sin but that in His work He was tempted in all respects like us (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 4:15)? The former seems to preclude the latter. This apparent difficulty, I think, stems from a understanding of sin that is not as broad as Paul’s in Romans 3:23 and a tendency to view good and evil as opposites, rather than as two manifestations of the same tree (Gen. 2:9).

In Romans 3:23, Paul indicates that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. “Instead of expressing God, man expresses sin and his sinful self. Hence, man falls short of God’s glory. This falling short of God’s glory and expression is sin” (Recovery Version, note 1). Anything that is short of God’s glory is sin, and God’s glory can issue forth only from God’s life. When we live according to our fallen human life, the sin of not expressing God by the operation of the divine life is both real and apparent. If Christ had lived according to His perfect human life rather than the divine life, then, in effect, His living too would have fallen short of the glory of God, and the sin of not expressing the divine life would have been just as real, even if not as apparent. The temptation that Christ daily faced and triumphed over, which we also daily face, was the temptation to not live by the divine life. He lived a life of denying His perfect human life, and we too must live a life of denying our fallen human life. Given the human tendency to regard good behavior as the highest goal of the human life and thus to be satisfied with an outward perfection that is patterned after the law of good in our minds (7:23), the temptation that Christ faced was a challenge far greater than what we face. And with the daily defeats that we encounter from the operation of the law of sin and of death in our members (v. 23; 8:2), the touchstone of our need to turn to our regenerated human spirit to allow the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus to operate is certainly more apparent and immediate in our experience.

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