

# *From Judicial Reconciliation to Organic Salvation in Romans 5 through 8 through the Operation of the Law of the Spirit of Life*

*by John Pester*

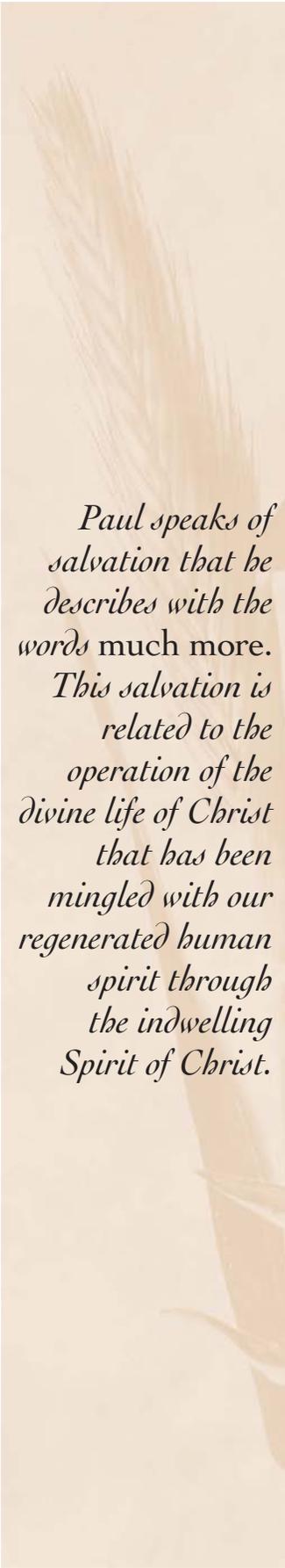
*Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and thus death passed on to all men because all have sinned. (Rom. 5:12)*

*For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death. (Rom. 8:2)*

As Christians, we all experience and appreciate God's judicial reconciliation based on the redemptive death of Christ on the cross as presented in Romans 1:1 through 5:11. This experience occurred at the justifying moment of our faith in Christ. Many Christians, however, do not experience and appreciate God's organic salvation based on the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus as presented in 5:12 through 8:13. This experience occurs in an ongoing process of sanctification that counters the organic constitution of sin in our fallen human nature. Still fewer Christians experience and appreciate the process of our corporate and organic conformation to the image of His Son as presented in 8:14 through 39. This experience occurs in the midst of our human sufferings in order that we would express the corporate Body of Christ. The organic salvation revealed in Romans 5:12 through 8:39 is much more than judicial reconciliation and justification. It is a present experience that extends into eternity future, it is sustained by the sanctifying operation of the law of the Spirit of life in the midst of human sufferings, and it is manifested in the corporate expression of the organic Body of Christ.

## **From Judicial Reconciliation to Organic Salvation**

Many commentators recognize that there is a shift in Paul's presentation of the contents of the gospel of God beginning in Romans 5:12.<sup>1</sup> Although this shift is acknowledged, the intrinsic elements in this shift and their subsequent impact on the unfolding revelation of the gospel is not readily apparent in these commentaries. There is a shift from a focus on the sinful acts that emanate from our fallen humanity to the sinful nature of our fallen humanity itself. There is a shift from a focus on our judicial reconciliation to God to our experience of God's organic salvation involving the operation of the divine life in us. And there is a shift from a focus on individual accountability before a righteous God to the corporate expression of the God of glory Himself. Paul does not present these shifts simply for the sake of doctrinal development. Instead, he uses the form of his teaching in chapters 5 through 8 to deliver spiritual content as a gift to the believers in Rome and, by extension, to all those who can continue to receive his establishing words (1:11; 6:17; 16:25; Col. 4:15-16). All these shifts are dependent upon the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in us, an organic operation that is situated in our regenerated human spirit and that is practically experienced in the midst of human tribulations and sufferings.



*Paul speaks of salvation that he describes with the words much more. This salvation is related to the operation of the divine life of Christ that has been mingled with our regenerated human spirit through the indwelling Spirit of Christ.*

Paul signals these shifts in Romans 5:10, which says, “If we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled.” After speaking of our judicial reconciliation to God, which was made possible through the death of His Son, Paul speaks of a salvation that involves something that he simply describes with the words *much more*. This salvation involves much more than judicial reconciliation, wonderful as it is, and it transcends the merely judicial aspect of reconciliation, comprehensive as it is. This ongoing salvation is related to the presence and operation of the divine life of Christ that has been mingled with our regenerated human spirit through the indwelling Spirit of Christ (8:9). It is this life that deals with our constitution of sin, it is this life that is the basis for an ongoing process of organic sanctification, and it is this life that transforms us from individual sinners to blended members of the corporate Body of Christ.

The importance of 5:10 should not be underestimated or skimmed over lightly, because everything changes in Paul’s unfolding revelation of the gospel after he writes these words. Prior to 5:10 he presents a thorough examination of how God’s righteousness has been appeased by the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross, referring to clear types of God’s judicial justification in the Old Testament and writing with plain words in his Epistle (3:25-26). Christ’s death opened a way for God’s judicial justification and for a judicial reconciliation to God that is once for all (5:1-2). When speaking of this reconciliation, Paul uses the terms *justification* (4:25; 5:16), *justify* (3:30), *justifies* (v. 26; 4:5), and *justified* (2:13; 3:20, 24, 28; 5:1, 9) without any modifiers. After 5:10, however, as he develops the matter of God’s organic salvation, he modifies the term *justification* with the phrase *of life* in 5:18, indicating that the justification that initiates and makes possible God’s “much more” salvation is intrinsically related to the divine life, which serves as the ongoing basis for God’s organic salvation.<sup>2</sup> In Paul’s shift from judicial reconciliation to organic salvation, however, he does not abandon the judicial foundation of justification; rather, he builds an organic, corporate expression upon it, an expression that reflects the fulfillment of God’s corporate expression of His Son through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life.

#### *From Sinful Acts to the Nature of Sin in Romans 5 through 8*

Although the operation of the law of the Spirit of life is certainly effective against the sinful things that issue forth from our flesh (8:2, 5), things that Paul speaks of prior to 5:11, he speaks of it directly only after a thorough discussion of our constitution of sin in 5:11 through 7:25, presenting the law of the Spirit of life as the unique organic counterweight to our organic constitution of sin (8:2-4). In God’s eyes, our constitution of sin is the greatest frustration to our corporate and organic conformation to the image of His Son, who was sent in the likeness of the flesh of *sin* and concerning *sin* to condemn *sin* in the flesh (8:29, 3). Our constitution of sin is an organic inheritance passed on to us through the fallen human nature that we received from Adam. Paul shifts his focus from sinful acts (1:29-32; 3:23) to the nature of sin itself after 5:11 because the sinful acts that God righteously addressed through His judicial reconciliation are rooted in a much deeper organic constitution of sin.

Up to v. 11 sins (plural) have been dealt with. From v. 12 sin (singular) is dealt with. It seems that in chs. 5–8 sin is personified. Sin is not merely an action; it is like a person who can enter (v. 12), reign (v. 21), lord it over people (6:14), deceive and kill people (7:11), and dwell in people and cause them to do things against their will (7:17, 20). It is quite alive (7:9) and exceedingly active; hence, it must be the evil nature of Satan, the evil one, who, having injected himself into man through Adam’s fall, has now become the very sinful nature dwelling, acting, and working in fallen man. This indwelling, personified sinful nature is the root of all the outward sinful acts. (Lee, Recovery Version, 5:12, note 2)

In 5:12 Paul begins to speak of the organic constitution of sin and death in Adam, a

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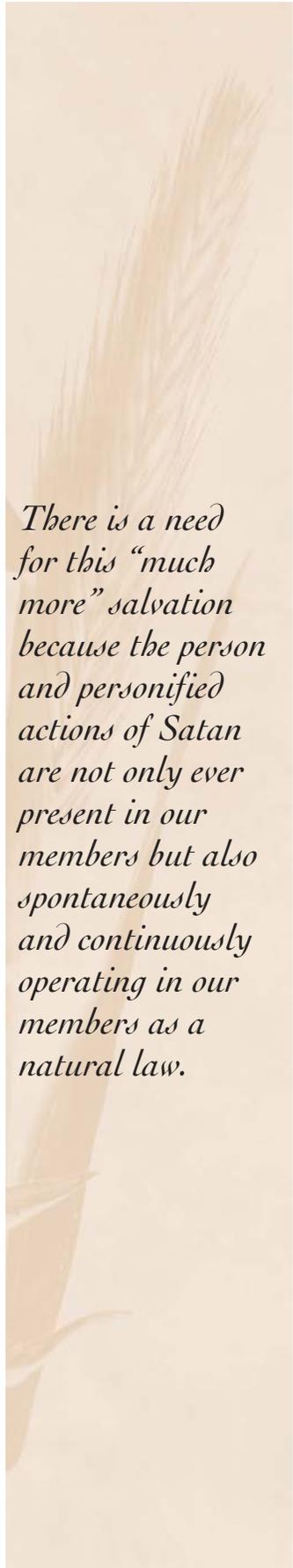
constitution that is an inheritance of nature in all fallen humanity, even in redeemed and regenerated believers. This sinful nature is personified in Romans 6 and 7, indicating that its source can only be the fallen life and nature of Satan, which operates as a natural law—the law of sin and of death (8:2). This law produces sins and death because it has the capacity to overpower the law of good in our mind that futilely endeavors to affirmatively fulfill the holy law of God (7:21-23). The law of sin and of death is the operation of the nature of sin that entered into the world through Adam’s transgression, and it is a hereditary constitution that causes every person to engage in sinful acts: “Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and thus death passed on to all men because all have sinned” (5:12). In the fall the organic nature of Satan entered into Adam and produced an organic constitution of sin that has subsequently been passed on to all humanity: “Through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners” (v. 19).

Through his fall Adam received an element that was not created by God. This was the satanic nature, which became the constituting essence and main element of fallen man. It is this constituting essence and element that constituted all men sinners. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. Whether we do good or evil, in Adam we have been constituted sinners. This is due to our inward element, not our outward actions. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 19, note 1)

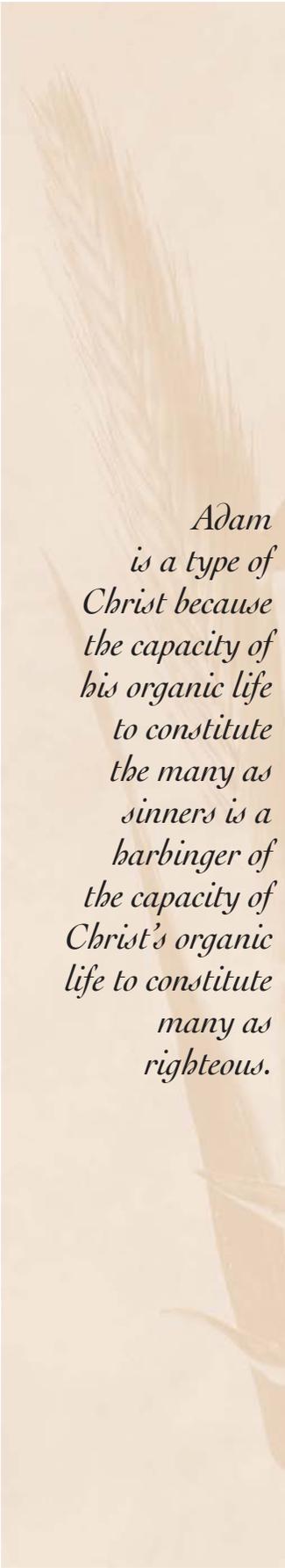
It is this inward element of sin in us that the divine life of God in Christ must address continually in order for us to participate in the “much more” salvation that follows judicial reconciliation from past sins. When the devil was defeated in the crucified flesh of Christ on the cross, our past sins were forgiven, but the life of the crucified and resurrected Christ, even the crucified and resurrected Christ Himself, must still be applied to the constitutional vestige of the sinful nature of Satan present in our flesh (7:21, 23). Even if we were able to confess every sinful act that we have committed subsequent to our reconciliation to God, the constitution of sin in our flesh would remain untouched and would continually produce more sinful acts. And even if all these sins were forgiven based on our confession,<sup>3</sup> God would still need to deal with the constitution of sin in us in order for us to be presented holy and without blemish before Him (Eph. 1:5; 5:27).

Being holy and without blemish is related not only to being forgiven of our sins but also to being experientially freed from the operation of the nature of sin in our members (Rom. 8:2). The nature of sin has entered into the world, that is, into humanity (5:12), and once it was in the world, it assumed a reigning position (v. 21). It is the authoritative power of Satan that lords over humanity (6:14). Emanating from the father of lies, who is a murderer from the beginning, the satanic nature deceives and kills humanity (John 8:44; Rom. 7:11). Through sin as the law of his nature, Satan imposes his sinful will on all humanity (vv. 9, 17, 20). Consequently, in order for God’s will to be enacted, the organic constitution of Satan’s will must be organically counteracted through God’s “much more” organic salvation.

**T**here is a need for this “much more” salvation because the person and personified actions of Satan are not only ever present in our members but also spontaneously and continuously operating in our members as a natural law. Just as the God-created human life inclines toward the good of God’s holy law through the presence of a natural law of good in our God-created humanity (vv. 21-23), the corrupted life of Satan inclines toward sin and death through the presence of a natural law of sin and death in our members (v. 23). Without an absolute dependence on her husband and, by extension, God, Eve’s good life was unable to withstand the deceptions emanating from Satan’s sin-filled life. Similarly, it is not possible for humanity, even redeemed and regenerated humanity, to withstand the ongoing sin-filled deceptions of Satan (1 Cor. 11:2-3), apart from a dependence on the operation of a higher law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the law of God’s divine life and nature.



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Although Paul unveils the liberating operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Romans 8, he lays the predicate for this revelation in chapter 5 when he begins to speak of the organic nature, constitution, and heritage of righteousness and grace in Christ (vv. 15-17). In this context he speaks of Adam as a type of Christ (v. 14), not in reference to Adam's transgression (vv. 15-16)<sup>4</sup> but in regard to Christ similarly producing a heritage of an organic constitution based on His highest life (v. 19), the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God. Just as we received an organic inheritance in Adam, we have received an organic inheritance in Christ. The former inheritance involves a constitution of sin and death; the latter inheritance involves a constitution of righteousness and grace. Adam is a type of Christ because the capacity of his organic life to constitute the many as sinners is a harbinger of the capacity of Christ's organic life to constitute many as righteous (v. 19). "Christ constitutes us righteous. When He, the living God, comes into our being as grace, we are constituted righteous. He becomes the constituting essence and element in us that can transform us from sinners into sons of God. He alone is able to accomplish such a reconstituting work" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 19, note 1). Through the disobedience of Adam, the many were organically constituted sinners, but through the obedience of the One, many have been organically constituted righteous. These consequences are the result of a process involving the organic transmission of life. As a result of Adam's one offense, death has been organically passed on to all men (v. 12), and death now reigns (v. 14). As a result of Christ's obedience, however, grace organically abounds, and life is a reigning component in those who have been freely justified by His grace (vv. 15, 17; 3:24).

Adam was the head of the old collective man (mankind). Whatever he did and whatever happened to him is participated in by all mankind. In this respect he is a type of Christ, who is the Head of the new corporate man, the church (Eph. 2:15-16). Whatever He did and whatever happened to Him is participated in by all the members of His Body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). (Lee, Recovery Version, 5:14, note 4)

Just as our organic heritage and identification in Adam involve a corporate living in the realm of sin and death, our organic heritage and identification in Christ bring us into a corporate living in the realm of righteousness and grace. It is on the basis and fact of our organic identification with Christ that Paul asks, "What then shall we say? Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (6:1). Here Paul is not asking whether we should continue *to* sin, that is, to commit sins, but rather whether we should continue *in* sin, that is, whether we should continue to live in and according to the constitution of the sinful nature in our members or in and according to the constitution of the divine life and nature in our regenerated and mingled human spirit (8:10).

The failure on the part of commentators to see Paul's shift in 5:12 from our sinful acts as a consequence of our sinful nature to our sinful nature as the source of our sinful acts undermines the import of his subsequent revelation of our need for an organic remedy to the constitution of sin in our being. By regarding Paul's question in 6:1—"Should we continue in sin?"—as a reference to continuing to engage in sinful acts, his subsequent revelation concerning our organic identification with Christ in His death and resurrection is diminished. Furthermore, such an understanding misdirects believers from appropriating the content of Christ's person and work, made available through the indwelling Spirit of life, to efforts to avoid sinful acts through human resolutions and behavior. Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch in *The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, for example, understand Paul's reference to "sin" in 6:1 as a reference to sins, saying, "Paul addresses a potential misunderstanding: If our sins let loose a flood of divine grace (5:20), then why not continue in sin to unleash ever more grace? Such logic betrays the very purpose of grace, which is to forgive us of past sins and to assist us in avoiding future ones" (24). Charles R. Swindoll in *Insights on Romans* echoes this perspective, saying, "Paul takes his opponents' rhetorical question, a challenge to the doctrine of grace, and puts it on display: "If sin brings grace, and lots of sins brings in a lot more grace, shouldn't we sin as much as possible in order to keep grace flowing from heaven?" (131). And even though

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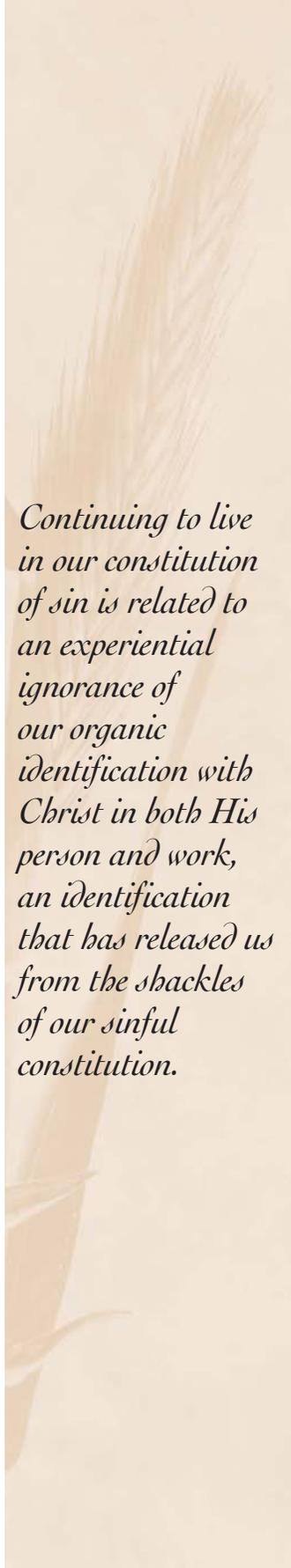
Arland J. Hultgren in *Paul's Letter to the Romans* says, "It is important to notice that here, as so often elsewhere, Paul speaks of 'sin' in the singular and as a power that seeks to control one's life" (243), he still associates the singular word *sin* with behavioral acts rather than with organic constitution, saying, "The argument implied by the question would be: If it is the case that 'where sin increased, grace was present in greater abundance' (5:20),' it follows that we should continue in sinful behavior, increasing sin, in order that grace might abound all the more" (242). When *sin* in 6:1 is inaccurately understood as "sins," that is, when it is understood to be a reference to sinful acts of human behavior rather than to the constitution of sin that produces sinful behavior, believers, ironically, are encouraged to address the problems that emanate from their sinful constitution by remaining in their sinful constitution, albeit focusing on the good aspects of their fallen human nature. Such efforts only ensure that they will continue to remain in their constitution of sin.

**W**hen Paul speaks of not continuing in sin in 6:1, however, he is speaking about our capacity in Christ to not continue to live according to the fallen organic constitution that we inherited from Adam. The rhetorical nature of the question "Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?" is not intended to remind us of the inappropriateness of using grace as a license to commit sins; this he does in 6:15, which says, "What then? Should we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace?" Instead, it is intended to remind us that the operation of grace, as the only effective organic countermeasure to our constitution of sin, is not dependent upon the operation of sin in order to be realized in our experience; that is, it is a reminder that we can experience an abundance of grace apart from any instigation from our sinful constitution because of the "much more" salvation available to us in the divine life of Christ, a life that is full of grace and reality. In effect Paul is endeavoring to remove the thought that there is any need for the operation of sin in order to activate the operation of grace.<sup>5</sup>

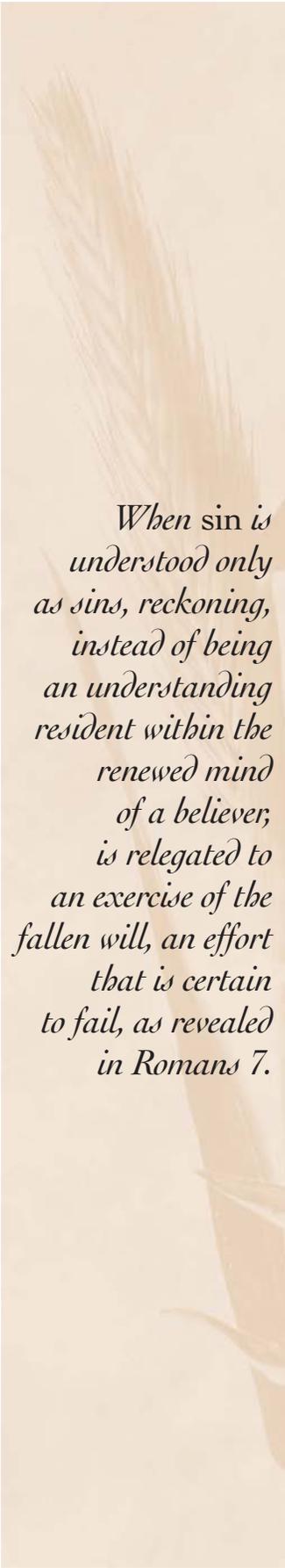
Instead of focusing on sins, Paul instead emphatically states in verse 2 that we have died to sin itself and are no longer bound to live in our constitution of sin. Since we have died to sin, there is no constitutional imperative in Adam that binds us to continue in sin. Instead, there is a deliverance by grace from any ongoing service as slaves to our constitution of sin (v. 6). Such a deliverance is possible because of our organic identification with Christ's death, which crucified the corrupted life and nature of the first man (v. 6; Gal. 2:20), and because of our organic identification with His resurrection, which imparted into us the divine life and nature of the divinized second man (1 Pet. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:47). Continuing to habitually live in our constitution of sin is related to an experiential ignorance of our organic identification with Christ in both His person and work, an identification that has released us from the shackles of our sinful constitution. Paul addresses such ignorance in Romans 6:3, asking, "Or are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" He answers this question by pointing to our organic identification with Christ in His death and resurrection in verse 4, saying, "We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life."<sup>6</sup>

All of Christ's accomplishments, including the effectiveness of His death and the power of His resurrection have been compounded with His life. As such, death lords it over Him no more (v. 9), and His living is wholly for God (v. 10). In His death and resurrection our old man with its constitution of sin was crucified (v. 6), we were justified from not only our sins but also from our nature of sin (v. 7), and we were released from a constitutional demand linked to the reigning power of sin (vv. 12, 14). Therefore, with our constitutional inheritance in Christ (v. 13), we too can now live according to God and not continue in sin.

The beginning of such a living is based on reckoning ourselves to be dead to our constitution



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of sin in Adam and living to God based on our constitution with the divine life in Christ (v. 11). Without seeing the organic facts presented by Paul in chapter 6, reckoning can easily become a human method to try to deal with sins that have already been dealt with. Frederic Louis Godet in *Commentary on Romans* rightly understands reckoning as being based on the positive facts presented in 6:1 through 10 but then posits that reckoning further involves moral effort on our part: “You have no longer to see your condition as you were in yourselves: slaves of sin, dead to God. You have to regard yourselves as you are in Christ, as I have just explained to you: dead to sin, alive to God...It thus puts a positive fact at the foundation of moral effort, to which the believer can return and have recourse anew at every instant” (249). The thought that there is a need for moral effort to apply the effectiveness of the Lord’s death is a regrettable consequence of misreading the word *sin* in chapter 6 as a reference to sins (vv. 1-2, 6-7, 11-12, 14, 16-18, 20, 22-23). When *sin* is understood only as sins, reckoning, instead of being an understanding resident within the renewed mind of a believer, is relegated to an exercise of the fallen will, an effort that is certain to fail, as revealed in Romans 7. When the repeated occurrences of the word *sin* in chapter 6 are rightly understood as references to the constitution of sin that cannot be perfected through efforts of the flesh (Gal. 3:3), beleaguered and ignorant believers will begin to appropriate the effectiveness of Christ’s accomplishments by faith through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life.

Reckoning is not a technique but a spontaneous believing, a spontaneous considering, produced by seeing the facts that are revealed in [Romans] chapter [6]. We must see and believe the facts, recognize them, and, according to them, reckon ourselves dead to sin and living to God.

Reckoning, however, is not the cause of death and cannot by itself execute the death of Christ within us. Only by the enjoyment of the Spirit, who is revealed in ch. 8, will we experience Christ’s all-inclusive and effective death and His resurrection and its power, which are revealed here in this chapter. This chapter shows the objective facts accomplished by Christ for us; these need our believing and reckoning. Chapter 8 shows the subjective work of the Spirit in making the facts accomplished by Christ real in our practical experience; this needs our fellowship with and enjoyment of Him. The facts spoken of in this chapter can become our experience only in the Spirit revealed in ch. 8. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Rom. 6:11, note 1)

The revelation of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in verse 2 of chapter 8 completes the arc of Paul’s consideration of the nature, constitution, and heritage of sin—an arc that begins in chapter 5, verse 12. There he references sin and death, saying, “Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin, death.” In chapter 6 the wages of sin are linked with death (v. 23), and in chapter 7 sin and death are identified as an organic law operating in our members (vv. 23-24). Then in chapter 8, Paul fittingly speaks of the law of the Spirit of life freeing us from the law of sin and of death (v. 2), completing the arc of the shift in his focus from sinful acts to the nature of sin in our being. The reality of the truths contained in chapters 5 through 8 are for our experience and are necessary in order to annul the operation of sin and death in our being. When we consider and truly see the attainments of Christ in His death and resurrection, there is spontaneous realization of these facts in our experience. Such an experiential realization mirrors Paul’s shift in focus from God’s judicial reconciliation to His organic salvation.

#### ***From Judicial Reconciliation to Organic Salvation in Romans 5 through 8***

In Romans 5:9 and 10 Paul speaks of our being justified in the blood of Christ and being reconciled to God through the death of His Son, both of which are related to judicial reconciliation. But beginning in the latter half of verse 10 and extending through the end of chapter 8, he focuses on the outworking of God’s organic salvation, which has

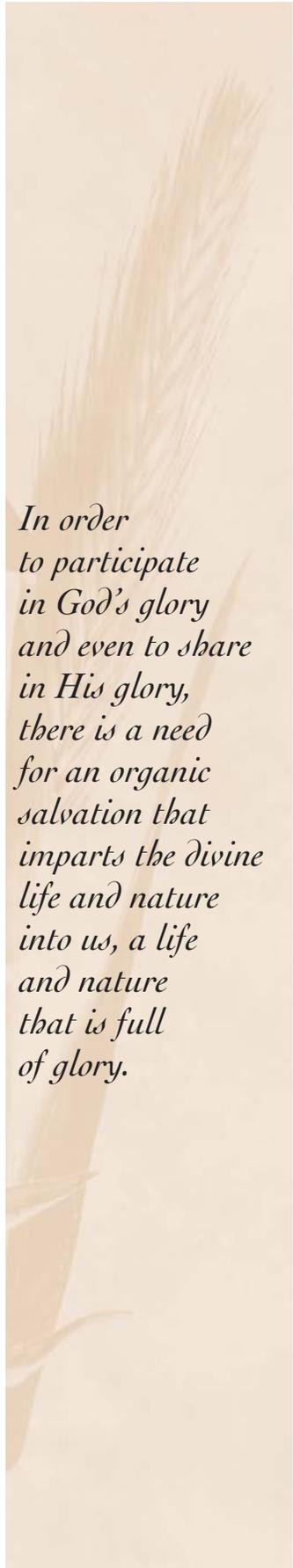
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been made possible through judicial redemption and reconciliation. In 5:11 Paul speaks of our having “received the reconciliation” as a basis for our “boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” *Boasting* does not refer to an objective boasting about God but to a boasting that originates in God through our organic identification with Christ. Without an organic identification with Christ, we could never boast *in God through* our Lord Jesus; we could only boast about God objectively. The boasting that pleases God is related to glory (v. 2), which is an attribute that cannot be separated from God’s organic life and nature (Acts 7:2; Col. 3:4). Consequently, in order to participate in God’s glory and even to share in His glory (Rom. 8:18, 21; 9:23; 15:7; 1 Cor. 2:7), there is a need for an organic salvation that imparts the divine life and nature into us, a life and nature that is full of glory (John 1:14). An organic salvation is needed because there cannot be any vestige of our sinful constitution with its organic identification with sin and death in our expression of the God of glory.

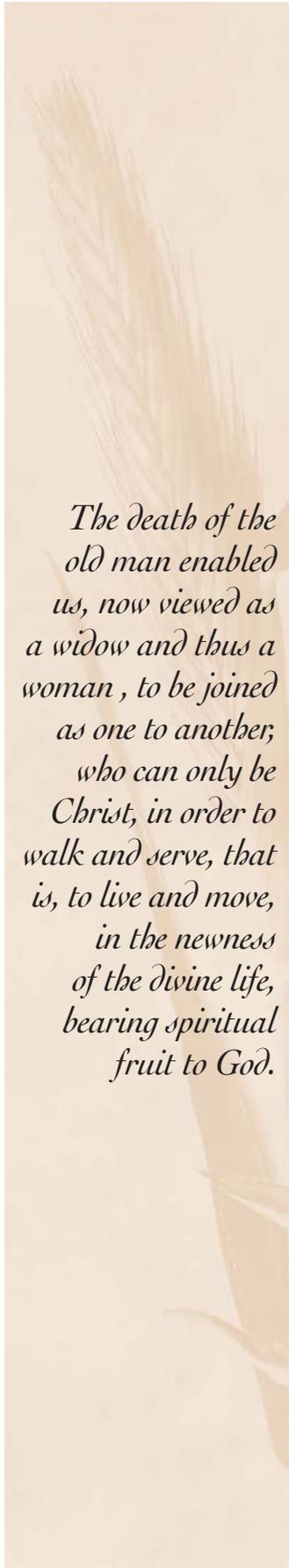
**W**ith a view to our participation in God’s glory at the end of Romans 8, Paul begins to unveil God’s organic salvation in chapter 5. This is because a salvation that deals with our constitution of sin and death must be sourced in the divine life of Christ. Although our manifested sins can be forgiven judicially through confession, the organic constitution of sin in our members can be annulled only organically. Thus, God’s goal of glorification cannot be attained through just a judicial forgiveness of sins; there is also a need for an operation of Christ’s divine life of glory in us. Paul shifts his focus from judicial reconciliation to organic salvation in Romans 5 through 8 because of God’s desire for glory in Christ and in the church (Eph. 3:21). This shift is presented both implicitly and explicitly.

In chapter 5 he implicitly speaks of God’s organic salvation in the context of receiving the abundance of grace and of reigning in life through the One, Jesus Christ: “Those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (v. 17). Both receiving and reigning are the result of an actual operation of the divine life in our ongoing experience. Receiving and reigning cannot be accomplished merely through judicial enactments and pronouncements related to redemption, justification, and reconciliation. While these judicial accomplishments are based on Christ’s obedient death on the cross (v. 19; Phil. 2:8), Paul focuses on Christ’s obedience in Romans 5:19 primarily to show that a judicial way has been opened so that we can be organically constituted with the righteous life and nature of Christ: “So also through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous.” *So also* in verse 19 is indicative of the “much more” organic salvation that Paul alludes to in 5:10. In verse 21 he speaks implicitly of God’s judicial reconciliation and speaks explicitly of God’s organic salvation, referring to our reigning in God’s organic life through our organic identification with Christ: “In order that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The phrase *just as* implicitly points back to the problems of sin and death that were addressed in God’s judicial reconciliation so that His organic life and nature could be received by us because of the satisfaction of His righteous requirement in the death of His Son. The phrase *so also* explicitly points forward to God’s ongoing organic salvation. In Paul’s thought Satan’s reign of sin has been terminated judicially so that grace can reign organically through the divine life available to us in Jesus Christ.

After speaking about the organic gift of righteousness in Christ that constitutes us righteous based on our receiving His righteous life and nature (vv. 17, 19), Paul continues to focus on advancing our understanding and experience of God’s organic salvation in chapter 6. In verses 4, 6, 8, and 22 there are references to the judicial aspect of God’s salvation, but these references serve only as a base for Paul’s further revelation of what is available to us in God’s organic salvation. In these verses the death of Christ is either in full view or assumed, and thus, the judicial aspect of God’s salvation is present in this chapter. However, this judicial aspect is presented primarily as a basis for Paul’s further unveiling of God’s provision of the divine life. As such, Paul’s paramount



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*The death of the old man enabled us, now viewed as a widow and thus a woman, to be joined as one to another, who can only be Christ, in order to walk and serve, that is, to live and move, in the newness of the divine life, bearing spiritual fruit to God.*

focus in this chapter is on the operation of the divine life in God in His ongoing organic salvation.

In verse 4 Christ's death is presented as being more than just a precursor to Christ's resurrection; it is the means by which the gift of His righteous life can be given to us as redeemed sinners so that we too may walk in the newness of Christ's resurrection life: "We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life." His judicial death is our entrance into His organic salvation. When Paul speaks of the judicial application of Christ's death to us who believe in verse 6, it is not for the sake of highlighting the forgiveness of our past sins but for the annulling of our body of sin in God's ongoing salvation in life: "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." The crucifixion of our old man was accomplished on the cross; it is an accomplished fact that made the application of God's judicial reconciliation possible. Hence, Paul uses the words *has been*. This aspect of our judicial reconciliation, however, is spoken of in the context of annulling our body of constituted sin in our ongoing experience of God's organic salvation. Hence, Paul uses the words *might be* and *should*. The shift in Paul's focus is underscored in verse 8, which speaks of the issue of God's judicial reconciliation being a living in an organic union with Him: "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him." Again, the portion related to God's judicial reconciliation is spoken of in the past tense—*we have died*, whereas the portion related to God's organic salvation is spoken of in the present tense—*we will live*. In verse 22 the death of Christ is not directly mentioned, but it is implied in Paul's words that we have been freed from sin: "Now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, eternal life." Our being freed from sin occurred in Christ's death on the cross, which satisfied God's righteousness and opened the way for us to receive His divine life. Having been freed from sin, we can now organically bear sanctified fruit to God, which is actually the fruit of the sanctified and holy God Himself. *Fruit* speaks of God's organic salvation because it is unto eternal life. If the end of God's full salvation is eternal life, the initiation and working out of this salvation must also necessarily involve an organic element that produces organic "fruit."

The thought of bearing fruit of the divine life is carried over from chapter 6 to chapter 7, when Paul speaks both of the death of the old husband, the old man, and of our being organically joined to Christ in life: "So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God" (7:4). "The husband here (the first husband) is not the flesh or the law but the old man mentioned in 6:6, who has been crucified with Christ. Thus, vv. 1-6 correspond with 6:6" (Lee, Recovery Version, 7:2, note 2). While the death of the old husband, our old man, speaks of God's judicial redemption when Christ's death was applied to the old man at the cross, our being joined to another, Christ, to bear fruit speaks of God's ongoing organic salvation. According to verse 6, we were discharged from the law in Christ's death so that now we can serve in the organic newness of the life of God: "Now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter." The crucifixion and death of the old man discharged us from the law in at least two aspects. First, the death of the old man in its identification with the crucified flesh of the incarnated Christ discharged us from the law's demand for righteousness, which was satisfied with the shed blood of Christ (Heb. 9:22). Second, the death of the old man discharged us from the holding power of sin, which seized the opportunity through God's giving of the law to hold and enslave us to sin (Rom. 7:5, 8, 11; 6:17-18). In addition to being judicially discharged from the law, the death of the old man enabled us, now viewed as a widow and thus a woman (7:2), to be joined as one to another (v. 3), who can only be Christ, in order to walk and serve, that is, to live and move, in the newness of the divine life, bearing spiritual fruit

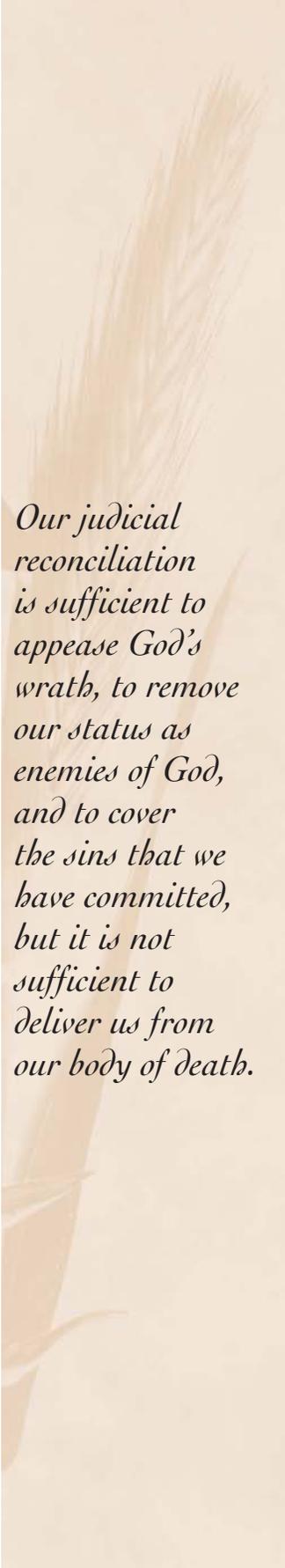
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to God (v. 4). Our discharge from the law, thus, has both judicial and organic implications, but nevertheless, all that is judicial in these verses is for all that is organic.

In speaking about the essential elements of God's organic salvation in chapters 5 through 7, including grace (5:15, 17, 20-21; 6:1, 14-15), resurrection (vv. 4-5, 9; 7:4), and life (5:17-18, 21; 6:4, 22), Paul ultimately associates the organic constitution of sin and death in us with the operation of a natural law in 7:7-25. This law of sin and of death operates in the members of our body in response to another natural law (vv. 13, 17-18, 21, 23), albeit a much weaker one, in our God-created humanity—the law of good in our mind (vv. 21-23). When the law of good in our mind inclines affirmatively toward upholding the law of God outside of us, the law of sin and of death seizes the opportunity to work out sins of every kind in us and through these sins to work out death in us (vv. 7-13), making us wretched in our continuing state of sin (v. 24). This state of wretchedness in verse 24 is not the condition of an unbeliever, as many think, but the condition of a believer who knows only and has experienced only God's judicial reconciliation. It is the condition of one who needs to know and experience God's organic salvation. Our judicial reconciliation is sufficient to appease God's wrath, to remove our status as enemies of God, and to cover the sins that we have committed, but it is not sufficient to deliver us from our body of death, a body constituted with sin and death that can continue to spontaneously and naturally confine us to a realm of slavery to sin, even to the point that God's judicial redemption has seemingly no experiential effect in our lives.<sup>7</sup>

Paul, however, experienced a freedom from the slavery of sin, a freedom that overturned the condition of wretchedness produced by the conflicting operations of the law of good in his mind and the law of sin and of death in his members. He associates this freedom in chapter 8 with the operation of a higher organic law—the law of the Spirit of life. This law is the means for God to fully bring us into an organic salvation which end is glorification. Paul's unveiling of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life completes the arc of his shift from judicial reconciliation to an organic salvation in the divine life, as signaled by the shift from judicial reconciliation in the first half of 5:10 to organic salvation in the latter half of the same verse. In chapter 8 this organic salvation is indicated repeatedly by the use of the preposition *in*, which speaks of our organic identification with Christ. We are in Christ Jesus (v. 1), we are freed by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (v. 2), the Spirit of God dwells in us (v. 9), Christ is in us (v. 10), the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us (v. 11), and His Spirit indwells us (v. 11). We are in Christ Jesus, and Christ Jesus is in us through an organic union in our spirit (v. 16), a union with the Spirit that is manifested spontaneously as a law of the Spirit's life. The function of the law of the Spirit of life is to cause us to grow in the divine life. Consequently, Paul speaks of us as children of God because the divine life has been imparted into our regenerated spirit (vv. 16, 10). Then he speaks of our growth in the organic life of God to become sons of God and even heirs of God when the divine life spreads from our human spirit to our mind and even to our mortal body (vv. 14, 17, 6, 11).

The prominence of God's organic salvation in chapter 8 is indicated by verses that speak of the basis for God's operation—the law of the Spirit of life; the location of this operation—the regenerated human spirit, the renewed mind, and the mortal body; the issue of this operation of life—growth in life from children to sons to heirs of God; and to the consummating expression of this life—judicially reconciled sinners who have been gloriously and corporately conformed to the image of His Son. In contrast to these numerous verses, the only explicit reference to God's judicial reconciliation in chapter 8 occurs in verse 3, which speaks of the condemnation of sin in Christ's flesh, a condemnation that occurred when He, like the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:9 that was in the likeness of a serpent but did not possess the serpentine nature, was lifted up on the cross (John 3:14). This reference to judicial reconciliation, however, only serves to point to an ongoing experience of God's organic salvation that is dependent



*Our judicial reconciliation is sufficient to appease God's wrath, to remove our status as enemies of God, and to cover the sins that we have committed, but it is not sufficient to deliver us from our body of death.*

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upon us walking according to the divine life in our regenerated human spirit (Rom. 8:4). Such a walk is practically realized by minding the things of the Spirit in our spirit and then by setting our mind on these things (vv. 5-6).

When we allow the law of the Spirit of life to spontaneously impart the organic life of God into our entire tripartite being, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us (v. 4), a fulfillment that was impossible when we relied only upon the law of good in our mind. Furthermore, we are not in the flesh experientially (v. 9), and we are under no constraining obligation to live according to the flesh (v. 12), that is, to continue in sin. Not being in the flesh and not living according to the flesh are the experiential consequences of God's organic salvation. Such a being and living ultimately reproduce the image of God's Son in us by conforming us as individual sinners into the image of His Son as an enlarged corporate expression (v. 29).

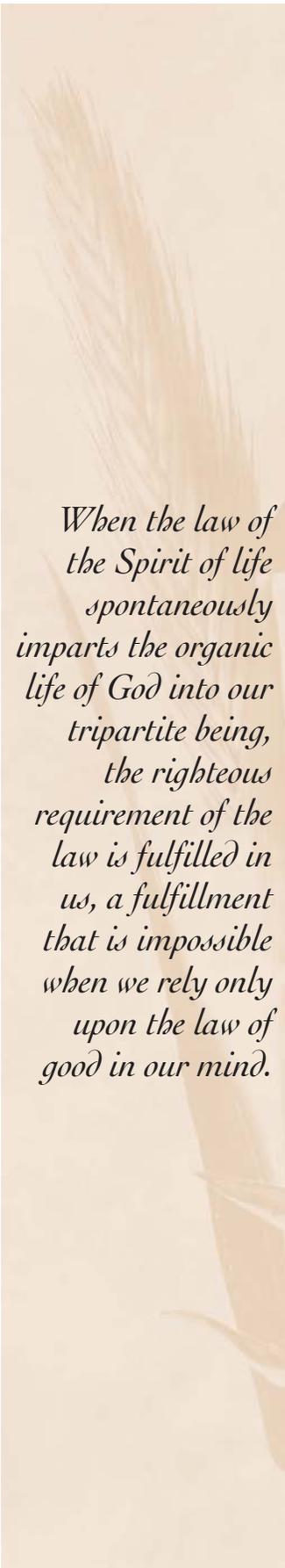
*From Individually Accountable Sinners to  
a Corporately Manifested Expression in Romans 5 through 8*

The shift in Paul's focus from God's judicial reconciliation to God's saving operation in life is also reflected in an advancement from his speaking about God's judicial treatment of the accountable acts of individual sinners prior to 5:10 to his speaking about an organic operation that consummates in an enlarged corporate manifestation of God's Son in verse 29 of chapter 8: "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers." Although this shift in focus is completed at the end of chapter 8, it begins in 5:12 with Paul's discussion about our organic heritage in Adam and in Christ.

**A**t an intrinsic level, verses 12 through 21 of chapter 5 are not about two individual men but about two men who are organically corporate in God's eyes. In the offense of one, the many died, and with the free gift of grace, the many will reign in life through the One (vv. 15, 17). In the offense of one, all were condemned, and with the righteous act of One, justification of life is available to all who are joined to this One through faith (v. 18). Ultimately, in the disobedience of one, the many were constituted sinners, and with the obedience of the One, many were constituted righteous (v. 19). Following the order of humanity's need to experience God's judicial reconciliation, there is a presence of corporate death in verses 15 and 17, the presence of corporate condemnation in verse 18, and ultimately, the presence of a corporate constitution of sin that requires individual accountability in order to appease God's righteousness in verse 19. In contrast to this progression of facts related to humanity's need to experience God's judicial reconciliation, there is a progression in the facts related to the corporate aspect of God's organic salvation. There is the initial presence of the grace of Christ in verse 15 and a continuing presence in verse 17, there is the presence of an ongoing justification of life in verse 18, and ultimately, there is the presence of a corporate constitution of righteousness that is expressed organically through the One, Jesus Christ, who has been enlarged through the operation of God's life in verse 19.

All of chapter 6 should be read with an understanding that Paul is speaking about our corporate identification in the old man and our corporate identification in Christ Jesus as well as about the corporate consequences associated with a corporate constitution related to both sin and righteousness. It is not our individual self that was crucified but the old man of the old creation with his old and fallen corporate nature. The crucifixion of the old man with Christ in His death on the cross (v. 6) was a corporate crucifixion that not only covered our individual sins but also terminated the sinful nature of the corporate old man. Following this corporate death, there was a corporate resurrection (v. 5) so that we could have a corporate living with and in Christ Jesus (v. 8).

The consequences of our corporate living in Adam include both a corporate enslavement



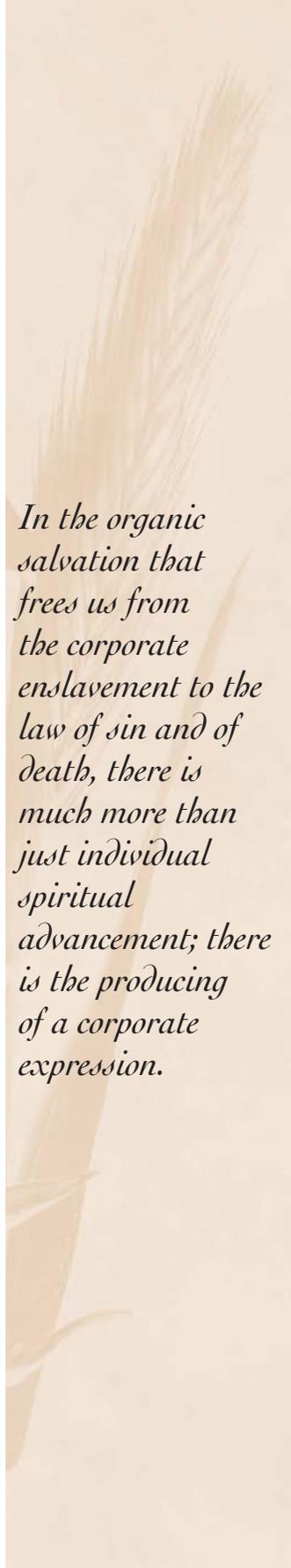
*When the law of  
the Spirit of life  
spontaneously  
imparts the organic  
life of God into our  
tripartite being,  
the righteous  
requirement of the  
law is fulfilled in  
us, a fulfillment  
that is impossible  
when we rely only  
upon the law of  
good in our mind.*

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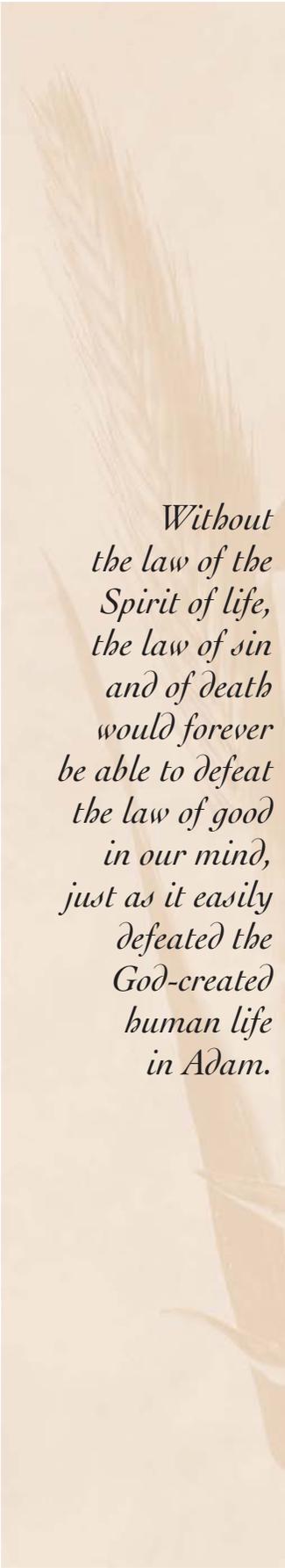
to sin and a corporate presentation of our members as weapons of unrighteousness to sin (vv. 6, 17, 13, 19). Although there is a requirement of individual accountability for sins in God's plan of full salvation, the enslavement and presentation of our members to sin are not the consequences of individual sins; they are the consequences of our corporate constitution of sin. It is our constitution of sin that enslaves us to uncleanness and lawlessness, and it is our constitution of sin that causes us to present our members as weapons of unrighteousness. The consequences of our corporate identification in Christ, however, include both a corporate enslavement to righteousness and a corporate presentation of our members as weapons of righteousness to God (vv. 18, 13). Although there is an individual receiving of God's gift of grace in His plan of full salvation, the enslavement and presentation of our members to God are not issues of individual spirituality; they are the issues of our corporate constitution of righteousness. It is our constitution of righteousness that enables us to present our members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification (vv. 19, 22).

In chapter 7 the dead husband in verses 1 through 3 does not represent individual believers who have individually died with Christ but rather the corporate old man who was crucified with Christ, and the woman who is freed from the law regarding the husband, the law given by God to expose the sinfulness of the old man constituted with sin, is also a corporate representation, because she has been freed to be joined to the one Christ (v. 4). Just as a man is joined to one wife, Christ is joined to only one organic counterpart. There are not many believers who have been individually joined to Christ, but many believers who are corporately joined to one another by being joined to the one Christ, being at the same time members individually and also members one of another in the Body of Christ (12:4-5).<sup>8</sup>

**I**n Paul's further development of the corporate culmination of God's organic salvation, the two intrinsic laws within fallen humanity in Romans 7:7-25 should also be considered as being corporate in nature. This is because the law of good in the mind is resident within the corporate humanity created by God, and the law of sin and of death is resident within this same corporate humanity, a humanity that has also been constituted with Satan's nature of sin. In Paul's account of the simultaneous operation of these two laws, he speaks from an intensely personal perspective, using either the pronouns *I* and *me* in every verse from 7 through 25, with the exception of verse 12. This might give a reader of this Epistle the thought that Paul's experience of willing to do good but of being overcome with sins emanating from his sinful nature is not necessarily repeatable in someone else's experience, as if the fallen will of one could be stronger against the power of sin than the fallen will of another. Paul, however, removes all possibility for this thought when he transitions from *I* and *me* in chapter 7 to the plural pronouns *us* (vv. 4, 18, 32, 35, 39), *you* (vv. 9-11, 13, 15), and *we* (vv. 12, 15-17, 22-26, 28, 31, 36-37) in chapter 8. The transition from *I* and *me* begins in verse 4 when Paul speaks about the fulfillment of God's righteous requirement in us, that is, not just in our individual behavior but in our very constitution, a constitution that is corporate in nature. This fulfillment ultimately rests upon God's corporate predestination of us to be His corporate expression, His corporate calling and justification of us in time through the application of the effectiveness of Christ's death to both our sins and our constitution of sin, and His corporate glorification of us in the coming age (v. 30). God's organic life, which is the base of His organic salvation, reproduces God in us, not as individual expressions of God but as one corporate expression of the God who is one. In the organic salvation that frees us from the corporate enslavement to the law of sin and of death, there is much more than just individual spiritual advancement; there is the producing of a corporate expression. And while there is a need for individual accountability through repentance for our actions and condition in order to obtain God's judicial reconciliation, the end result of God's organic salvation is a corporate expression that is conformed to the image of His Son, an image that is one in nature and expression with the Son and, hence, can only be corporate in His nature and expression. Our experience



*In the organic salvation that frees us from the corporate enslavement to the law of sin and of death, there is much more than just individual spiritual advancement; there is the producing of a corporate expression.*



*Without  
the law of the  
Spirit of life,  
the law of sin  
and of death  
would forever  
be able to defeat  
the law of good  
in our mind,  
just as it easily  
defeated the  
God-created  
human life  
in Adam.*

needs to mirror Paul's shift from individual accountability to corporate expression, just as it needs to mirror his shift from judicial reconciliation to organic salvation and from dealing with sinful acts to dealing with our nature of sin. Such a mirroring depends upon the operation of the law of the Spirit of life.

### **The Operation of the Law of the Spirit of Life Facilitating God's Organic Salvation in the Midst of Tribulations and Sufferings**

The shift in Paul's focus from judicial reconciliation to organic salvation in Romans 5 through 8 culminates in his revelation of the law of the Spirit of life in Romans 8:2. This law is operative in all three parts of our tripartite being as we are in the midst of human circumstances that unavoidably involve sufferings that stem from our constitution of sin and that also deal with our constitution of sin. The operation of the law of the Spirit of life in conjunction with tribulations and sufferings will ultimately bring us into a corporate realm of glory in the divine life. The law of the Spirit of life is the means by which we experience God's organic salvation, because God's full salvation depends upon our receiving and being experientially constituted with the divine life of the Triune God that is communicated by the Spirit. This Spirit of life is the life-giving Spirit and the Spirit who gives life (1 Cor. 15:45; John 6:63).<sup>9</sup> Although the phrase *the law of the Spirit of life* occurs only once in the New Testament, its prominence at the beginning of chapter 8, a chapter that unveils the consummation of both God's judicial reconciliation and His organic salvation, should not be overlooked. Furthermore, its inclusion in the context of the operation of the law of good and of the law of sin and of death is equally indicative of its importance, because it speaks of a higher provision for our deliverance from the throes of our constituted nature of sin. Without the law of the Spirit of life, the law of sin and of death would forever be able to defeat the law of good in our mind, just as it easily defeated the God-created human life in Adam.

According to Hebrews 2:6-7, humanity was made "a little inferior to the angels." As such, the God-created human life can never, by its own strength alone, be sufficient to withstand the deceptive power in the fallen angelic life of Satan. Adam and Eve could have prevailed in their encounter with Satan only if they had first partaken of the tree of life, which was representative of the divine life of God. They could have prevailed only through an organic dependence on God. Without such an organic dependence, it was impossible for them to not be deceived, to not disobey God, and to not invoke His wrath. The "original sin" of Adam and Eve was not their disobedience by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but in their not eating the fruit of the tree of life. This same choice faces us today. Like God, who indicated that death would be the issue of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Paul simply reminds us that when we set our mind on the flesh, the result will be death, and when we set our mind on the spirit, the result will be life and peace (Rom. 8:6). He does not admonish us to not set our mind on the things of the flesh; he only reminds us of the availability of the divine life and of our capacity to now mind the things of the Spirit (v. 5). This is because when we set our mind on the spirit, the operation of the law of the Spirit of life is activated to defeat the proclivities of our flesh, which are under the influence and power of the law of sin and of death. Without the operation of the law of the Spirit of life, there is no freedom from the law of sin and of death, and without the operation of the law of the Spirit of life, humanity would be under a continuing enslavement to sin, a condition that would effectively negate both God's judicial reconciliation, because these judicial elements must be organically applied to us, and God's organic salvation, because the divine life, conveyed through the spontaneous operation of the law of the Spirit of life, would not be available to us. Given its prominence in the economy of God,

the law of the Spirit of life is the subject of this chapter. The Spirit and life are mentioned in this verse, but only in connection with the working of this law...The law that has freed

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us from the law of sin, which is of Satan, who dwells in the members of our fallen body (Rom. 7:23, 17), is of this Spirit of life. It is this law, not God nor the Spirit, that works in us to deliver us from the working of the law of sin in our flesh and to enable us to know God and gain God and thereby live Him out...

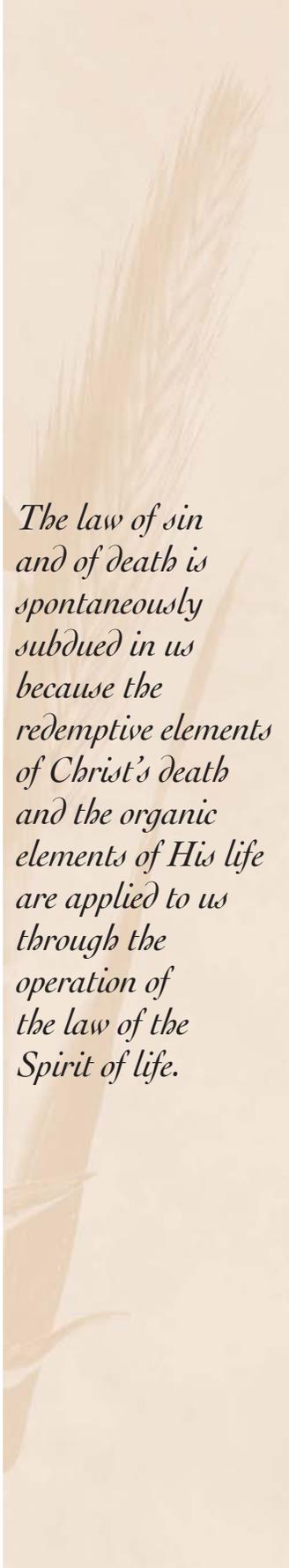
Both Satan and God, after entering into our being and dwelling in us, work within us not by outward, objective activities but by an inward, subjective law. The working of the law of the Spirit of life is the working of the processed Triune God in our spirit; this is also the working of the Triune God in us in His life. (Lee, Recovery Version, 8:2, note 1)

The law of sin and of death is spontaneously subdued in us because the redemptive elements of Christ's death and the organic elements of His life are applied to us through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life. The Spirit gives life, and this life in Christ Jesus includes all the wonderful redemptive elements associated with Christ's death and resurrection and all the power inherent in God's life and nature to manifest an enlarged expression of Himself in redeemed, regenerated, and glorified humanity. In the life that is supplied through the spontaneous operation of the law of the Spirit of life, there is a receiving of grace that counteracts our constitution of sin and enables us to reign in life in chapter 5, there is a participation in the death of Christ that nullifies our body of sin and enables us to walk in newness of life in chapter 6, there is a freedom from the holding power of the law of the old husband in chapter 7, and there is a progressive expansion in the operation of the divine life in our tripartite being in chapter 8.

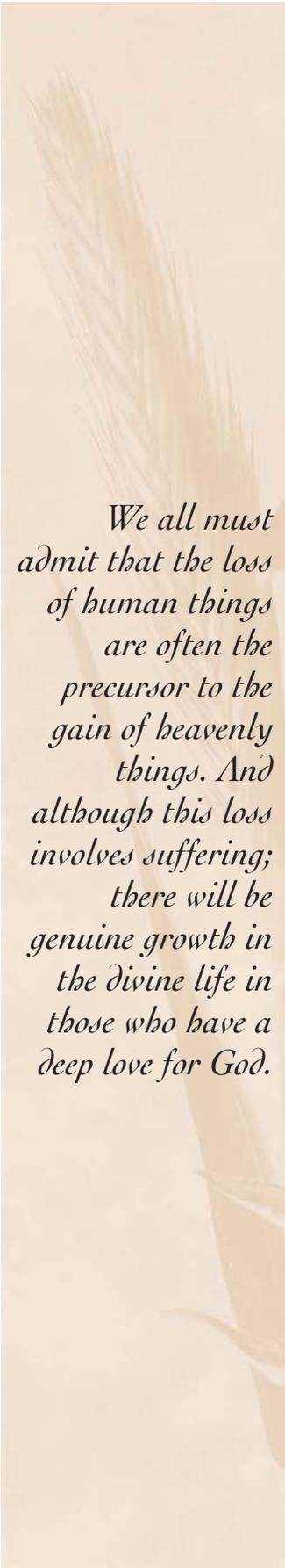
The spiritual life revealed in this chapter is fourfold. First, it was the divine life in the Spirit (v. 2). Second, it became life in our spirit through regeneration (v. 10). Then from our spirit it saturates our mind for the transformation of our soul, to which our mind belongs, and becomes the life 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). (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 8:2, note 3)

Although the operation of the law of the Spirit of life is spiritual and even mystical, it occurs in the midst of the environmental circumstances and situations that God has practically arranged, an arrangement that is often fraught with tribulations and sufferings that touch both the inward parts of our soul and our physical body. The depth of Paul's revelation in the first half of chapter 8 pertaining to the operation of the law of the Spirit of life, including such seemingly unobtainable spiritual experiences as walking according to the spirit (v. 4), minding the things of the Spirit (v. 5), not being in the flesh but in the spirit (v. 9), putting to death the practices of the body (v. 13), is counterbalanced by his practical words related to human suffering in the latter half of the chapter.

Paul's words concerning sufferings are not meant to serve merely as words of encouragement to those facing difficult times, as these words are often used. Rather, Paul understands that tribulations and sufferings are an essential component to our participation in the glory inherent in God's organic salvation. He first references tribulations and sufferings at the beginning of chapter 5, speaking of boasting because of the hope of the glory of God and boasting in our tribulations, which produce endurance, approvedness, and hope (vv. 2-4). He again references tribulations and sufferings at the end of chapter 8, speaking of their relationship to our hope of being freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (vv. 18-21). We were saved in hope (v. 24), a hope for an organic salvation that will reveal to all creation that we are sons of God according to the life and nature that has been imparted into us through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life. In our sufferings we groan, and the Spirit intercedes, not according to our desire for relief but according to God, that is, according to His desire for our growth and maturity in the divine life. And so God then causes all these suffering, these things, to work together for our good (v. 28) so that we would be conformed to the image of His Son (v. 29), thereby effacing the image of the



*The law of sin and of death is spontaneously subdued in us because the redemptive elements of Christ's death and the organic elements of His life are applied to us through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life.*



*We all must admit that the loss of human things are often the precursor to the gain of heavenly things. And although this loss involves suffering; there will be genuine growth in the divine life in those who have a deep love for God.*

earthly and fleshly Adam with his constitution of sin (1 Cor. 15:49).<sup>10</sup> In our sufferings the constituted element of sin is progressively annulled and the constituted element of righteousness is progressively expanded in our inner parts when we by grace turn from the immediacy of our sufferings to focus on the goal that God desires to gain in the midst of our suffering. We all must admit that the loss of human things are often the precursor to the gain of heavenly things (Phil. 3:7). And although this loss involves suffering (v. 8), there will be genuine growth in the divine life in those who have a deep love for God (Rom. 8:28).

### Obeying the Form of Paul's Teaching

Paul's teaching in Romans is both judicial and organic in its form. In Romans 1:1 through 5:11 his emphasis is primarily judicial, but from 5:12 through 8:29, his emphasis is on a "much more" salvation that has been made possible through our judicial reconciliation, an organic salvation that deals with our constitution of sin, that imparts the organic life and nature of God into us, and that manifests our corporate status in Christ. Paul shifted his focus from sinful acts to the nature of sin itself in our being, and so we should put aside our own resolutions and efforts to exhibit good behavior, knowing that nothing good dwells in our flesh, and instead turn to our spirit to contact the Spirit of life who operates as a spontaneous law to bring us further into God. Paul shifted his focus from judicial reconciliation to organic salvation, and so we should advance beyond teachings that are merely judicial and objective, knowing that the letter kills but that the Spirit who gives life is operating as a subjective law in our being. And Paul shifted his focus from individual accountability to the gaining of a corporate expression of Christ, and so we should endeavor to let the law of the Spirit of life reframe our thoughts and actions to account for the needs of the Body rather than our own in order to genuinely care for the things of Christ. This is the form of teaching that we should obey, not simply as a matter of doctrinal fidelity but as the motivation of our heart. **AF**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Commentators of all theological persuasions recognize that there is a shift in Paul's discourse following verses 10 and 11. In looking at various outlines of Romans, it is clear that some see the turn in verse 12 as a major turning point, including Frederic Louis Godet in his *Commentary on Romans* and C. I. Scofield in the Scofield Reference Bible. Others, while not elevating the shift to a higher level of significance in terms of the outline structure of Romans, nevertheless acknowledge it, including C. K. Barrett in *Black's New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle to the Romans*; Arland J. Hultgren in *Paul's Letter to the Romans*; Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch in *The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*; Charles R. Swindoll in *Insights on Romans*; John Murray in *The Epistle to the Romans*; C. E. B. Cranfield in *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*; and J. N. Darby in his New Translation. The content of this article is based on Witness Lee's outline of Romans, which identifies 5:12 through 8:11 as a major sectional division entitled "Sanctification" and 8:14-39 as a similar major sectional division entitled "Glorification."

<sup>2</sup>After 5:10 the term *justified* is used once in 6:7, which says, "He who has died is justified from sin," and twice in 8:30, which says, "Those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified." The term *justifies* is also used once in verse 33, which says, "Who shall bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies." In each of these instances the reference to justification should be read as it relates to a subjective justification that is the consequence of our partaking of the divine life rather than merely as a consequence of judicial forgiveness. *Justified* in 6:7 is spoken of in the context of annulling our body of sin, which annulling is an integral part of God's organic salvation. *Justified* in 8:30 is spoken of in the context of consummately completing the arc of God's salvation. In God's eyes, we can be glorified because, following our calling, our sanctified living will produce a corporate expression that is justifiably

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worthy of manifesting the glory of God Himself. *Justifies* in verse 33 is spoken of in the context of being freely given all things for our sanctification; that is, in the midst of sufferings, God is operating to impart His life into us, an impartation that will produce an organic expression that is worthy of His justification.

<sup>3</sup>The apostle John explicitly acknowledges both the presence of the nature of sin in us and our capacity as Christians to commit sins; he says, “If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). In a footnote on the phrase *do not have sin*, Witness Lee writes,

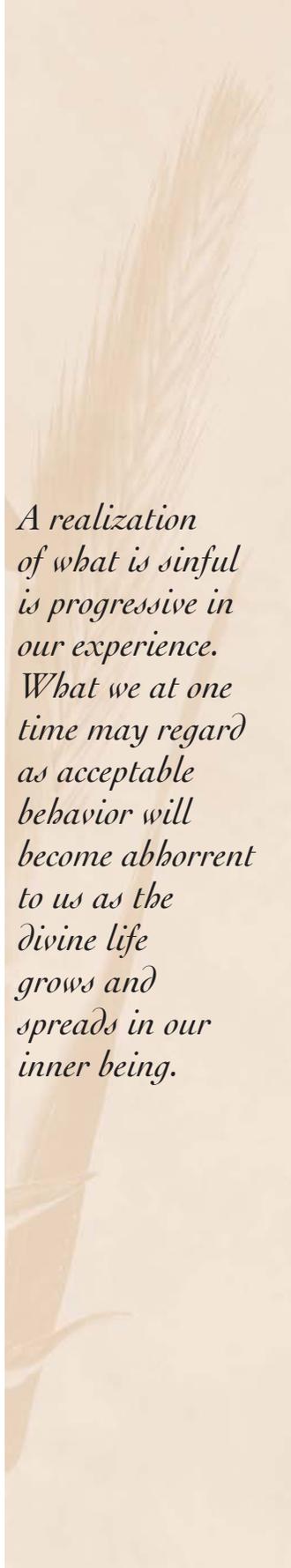
I.e., do not have the indwelling sin (Rom. 7:17) within our nature. This was what the Gnostic heresy taught. The apostle was inoculating the believers against this false teaching. This section, 1:7—2:2, deals with the believers’ sinning after their regeneration. Such sinning interrupts their fellowship with God. If after regeneration the believers do not have sin in their nature, how could they sin in their conduct? Even if they sin only occasionally, not habitually, their sinning is adequate proof that they still have sin working within them. Otherwise, there would be no interruption in their fellowship with God. The apostle’s teaching here also condemns today’s teaching of perfectionism, which says that a state of freedom from sin is attainable or has been attained in this earthly life; and it annuls today’s erroneous teaching of the eradication of the sinful nature, which, misinterpreting the word in 3:9 and 5:18, says that regenerated persons cannot sin because their sinful nature has been totally eradicated.

Our confession of sins is based on the Lord’s shining; that is, we should confess every sin that we become aware of in our fellowship with the Lord (see “Dealing with Sins” in *The Experience of Life* by Witness Lee, available online at [ministrybooks.org](http://ministrybooks.org)). Given our constitution of sin, all that we are and do apart from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Consequently, a realization of what is sinful is progressive in our experience. What we at one time may regard as acceptable behavior will become abhorrent to us as the divine life grows and spreads in our inner being. The Lord’s shining within us will become increasingly more detailed as it focuses on the thoughts and intentions that are related to sin itself and thus are deeply hidden even to us in our heart (Heb. 4:12).

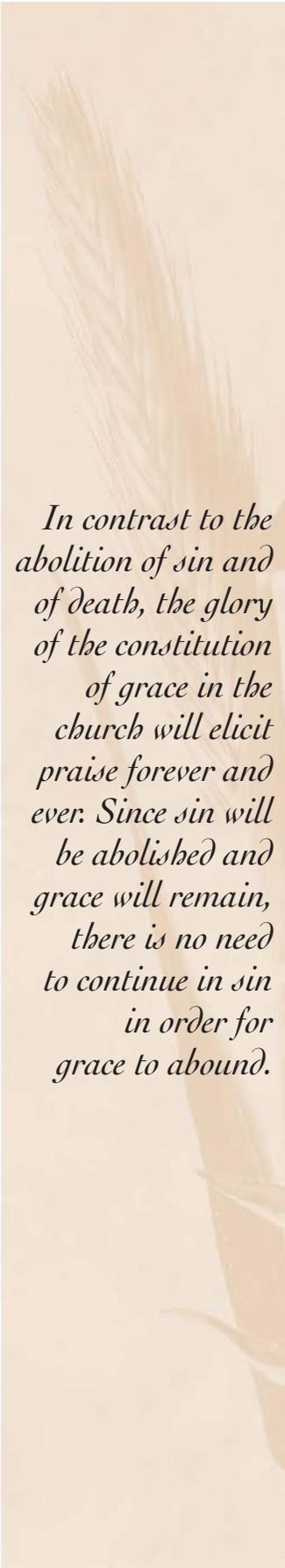
Prior to Christ’s justifying death, God’s outward written law was used by God to provoke an awareness of the sin lurking within and hidden to His chosen people (Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20), spurring them to identify with His atoning death through the offering of sacrifices that served as types of Christ (Heb. 9:6-14). After His justifying death, the operation of the law of the Spirit of life illuminates these hidden sins, making our sins of ignorance known progressively to us in the shining of His light (1 John 1:7). It is a mercy that the Lord’s shining is progressive. If it were not so, we would be unable to bear the intensity of His light. Job could bear the shining of the Lord, declaring his abhorrence of himself and repenting, not for negative sinful behavior but for works of righteousness which he had done (Titus 3:5), only at the end of the Lord’s long circumstantial dealing with him through his three friends (Job 42:6).

<sup>4</sup>In *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* C. E. B. Cranfield notes, “The purpose of 15-17 is to drive home the vast dissimilarity between Christ and Adam, before the formal comparison between them is made in v. 18f, as so to preclude possible misunderstanding of the comparison” (117). In Paul’s reference to Adam as a type of Christ in verse 14, he says, “Death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned after the likeness of Adam’s transgression, who is a type of Him who was to come.” Given the close proximity of the phrase *Adam’s transgression* to *who is a type of Him*, Paul is quick to differentiate between dissimilar and similar elements in the type. He references the dissimilarities through his use of the phrases *but it is not that as the offense was* in verse 15 and *it is not that as through one who sinned* in verse 16. In the type of Adam there is no similarity between Adam and Christ in relation to offenses and sin. Adam offended God and provoked His righteous condemnation, but Christ pleased God and satisfied His righteous demand through His atoning death. Adam sinned, but Christ was sinless in His human living. After pointing out these dissimilarities, Paul speaks only of the similarities between Adam and Christ in regard to the organic consequences of their actions.

<sup>5</sup>The fact that there is no causal link between sin and our experience of grace can be seen in



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*In contrast to the abolition of sin and of death, the glory of the constitution of grace in the church will elicit praise forever and ever. Since sin will be abolished and grace will remain, there is no need to continue in sin in order for grace to abound.*

the final disposition of death, which is terminated in the lake of fire and swallowed up in victory (Rev. 20:14; 1 Cor. 15:53-54), and in the continual dispensing of grace, which is signified by the eternal flowing of the river of water of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1). In the final disposition of death, the sting of sin that produces death cannot be found: "Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:55-56). In contrast to the abolition of sin and of death, the glory of the constitution of grace in the church will elicit praise forever and ever (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 3:21). Since sin will be abolished and grace will remain in eternity future, there is no need for us to continue in sin today in order for grace to abound.

<sup>6</sup>Given our organic identification with Christ, which is mystically realized through baptism into His death (Rom. 6:3), we have the capacity to not continue in sin by walking in the newness of Christ's resurrection life (vv. 1-2, 4). Walking in newness of life in 6:4 is equal to walking according to the spirit in 8:4. In such a walk the righteous requirement of God's law is fulfilled not *by* us but *in* us, as the divine life spreads from our mingled spirit to our soul and even to our mortal bodies through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life.

<sup>7</sup>In many cases the experience of a "backslidden" Christian is rooted in a continuing struggle with sin as a constitutional element rather than with just sins as behavioral actions. A new believer with only an appreciation of God's judicial reconciliation will enjoy a period of peace related to a release from the guilt and shame of his sins and even from a fear of God's wrath. But as he begins to incline toward the good in the law of his mind in order to please God, the law of sin and of death rises up within his members and begins to deceive and kill. As this experience of death increases, his weakness in overcoming the operation of sin in his members raises doubts in his mind about his initial salvation, about the effectiveness of God's judicial redemption, and ultimately about the possibility of truly living to God. In the midst of these doubts sins easily return, and with their return there is a return to the sinful practices of his sinful nature. This return to a continuation in sin occurs primarily because the form of teaching that he received has not presented nor imparted the organic elements of God's salvation, focusing only on God's judicial redemption, reconciliation, and justification.

<sup>8</sup>In the corporate body of Christ, the many are one Body but also individually members one of another (Rom. 12:5). The principle of distinction but not separation in the Godhead is reflected in the Body of Christ, which is the enlarged expression of the Triune God. *Individually* in verse 5 speaks of distinctions among all the members because not all have the same function (v. 4); *one of another* speaks of the absence of organic separation among the many functioning members of the Body.

<sup>9</sup>C. K. Barrett's translation of Paul's reference to the law of the Spirit of life in verse 2 in *Black's New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle to the Romans* is significant: "For in Christ Jesus the law of the life-giving Spirit has set thee free from the law of sin and death" (144).

<sup>10</sup>It is interesting to note that Paul speaks of bearing the image of the heavenly in 1 Corinthians 15:49 immediately after unveiling that the last Adam, Christ, became the life-giving Spirit in verse 45. In the life that is given, there is an organic operation that produces only one thing: an enlarged expression of Christ that is borne by the corporate Body of Christ.

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