

New Life in the Spirit The Birth of a Sturdy Hope

A Prep Guide for Sessions 5

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The Christian church has, over its nearly two thousand years in this world, endured the cooing of its extreme optimists and the ranting of its extreme pessimists. Some of our lot have falsely painted the walk with Christ as a newly bullet-proof, prosperity-protected alleviation of all suffering. (They usually end up disappointed.) Others have committed the other falsehood of describing life on this side of the pearly gates as a lightless drudgery, in which we simply hope to hold on to faith 'til the end. (They usually miss most of the good stuff.) In Romans 7—8, Paul presents a hybrid life that features both bliss, through the liberating presence of the Holy Spirit, and suffering, because we still live in these earthen bodies. Throughout these chapters, he supplies always a hint of anticipation that looks toward a time when, as he says in another letter, “we will see face to face.” The brilliance of this section of Romans, though, is its realistic, sturdy hope, which rises with the highlights and yet remains steady through the valley of the shadow. We turn, then, to one of the most magnificent stretches of scripture we have: Paul’s Letter to the Romans, chapters 7 and 8.

A New **ϋϋϋ** **δ̅**

You may recall that I am a HUGE fan of the Greek phrase **ϋϋϋ δ̅**. I can’t get enough of it! In fact, you may remember, a couple of sessions ago, when I proposed that we design a class T-Shirt with these very same Greek characters on it. I nominated this phrase, because it is absolute gold to a Romans reader. It appears first in 3.21, where it abruptly turns the tide of Paul’s letter, from the dark dregs of the human predicament he has laid out in 1.18—3.20, to the glorious good news of what God has done for helpless humanity through Christ, which he reveals in 3.21—6.28. Here's that first occurrence of our phrase:

We know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

BUT NOW (**ϋϋϋ δ̅**), *the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law...the righteousness of God through the faith of/in Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 3.19-21)

This Greek phrase became an absolute divider between the old and the new, the world before God’s radical intervention through Christ and the new world that the intervention ushered in.

Don't look now, but this week we've got another $\nu\nu\tilde{\nu}$ ðè sighting, and, because of our past experience and the whole tee shirt campaign, we know that we ought to stand up and take notice. In Romans 7.5-6, Paul once again describes an old world, before God's intervention through Christ, then introduces the interruption with our favorite phrase. Here's how it looks in English with the words that translate $\nu\nu\tilde{\nu}$ ðè bolded

⁵ For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

*⁶ **But now** we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7.5-6)*

Here, Paul sets us up to read Romans 7—8 well by signaling that we'll be passing through an old era describing how things were, and into a new era that has been inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Romans 8 will display the brilliant life in the Spirit that God opened through Jesus. But before Paul takes us there, he has to answer for some things that he has said about Moses' Law that seem to place it squarely in the old, dreary, pre- $\nu\nu\tilde{\nu}$ ðè world. This necessarily moves us into an exploration of Paul's theology of the Law.

Paul and the Law

For Saul of Tarsus, Moses' Law was at the center of the world. For him, as for all Pharisees and all devout Jews, the Law of Moses, through the interpretation and traditions of the rabbis, formed the primary connection point with God. Psalm 1 reflects this devotion when it begins with a blessing.

*Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked
or take the path that sinners tread
or sit in the seat of scoffers,
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper. (Psalm 1.1-3 - NRSV)*

Paul was not only among the happy that the Psalm describes. He was an A+ student practitioner. In his Letter to the Philippians (3.5-7), Paul allows himself a rare autobiographical moment to display his stellar resume within the hierarchy of rabbinic Judaism. By his report, Paul was,

- ◇ circumcised on the eighth day,
- ◇ of the people of Israel,
- ◇ of the tribe of Benjamin,
- ◇ a Hebrew of Hebrews;
- ◇ as to the law, a Pharisee;
- ◇ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;
- ◇ as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

In another passage from Galatians, he writes,

“You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.” (Galatians 1.13-14)

Clearly, pre-Christian Paul had a high regard for Moses’ Law and felt that he had mastered its precepts at least as well as anyone in his generation. He was rising in the ranks of the Pharisees, whom Josephus describes as virtuous ascetics (Antiquities 18.1) and Kaufmann Kohler, in his [Jewish Encyclopedia article](#), describes as “scrupulous observers of the Law as interpreted by the...Scribes, in accordance with tradition.” In short, Paul was quite good at Moses’ Law.

However, at the end of each of the passages I quote above from Philippians and Galatians, Paul describes an abrupt moment that interrupted his prior career. In Galatians, he describes the pivot point in his narrative – precisely the moment...

“...when [God] who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...” (Galatians 1.15-16)

And in Philippians, after summarizing an All-Pro early career as a Pharisee, Paul writes,

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Philippians 3.7-8)

In the one instance, he is rapidly transformed from scrupulous Pharisee into missionary to the Gentiles; in the other, he radically reassesses his former Law-observant attainments in light of his experience of Christ: it’s rubbish (literal Greek). In both cases, he quits viewing the Law as central to his connection with God -- as he had learned and practiced it among the Pharisees -- for a new main focus on Christ.

Paul’s decentralization of Law would, of course, have been suspect to non-Christian Jewish acquaintances, but most Jewish Christians would have made the same move in some form.

They would have listened first to Jesus, but with assurance that Jesus aligned himself with Moses. After all, in the Sermon on the Mount, he says,

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5.17-19)

Jewish Christianity like we see in Matthew and the Letter of James sees Jesus in this Moses-friendly way.

It's a long way from Matthew 5 to Romans 7! In Romans (and at least as radically, in Galatians) Paul says things about the Law that would get him in hot water, even with his Jewish Christian brothers and sisters. Already in this letter, Paul has

- ◇ chided his fictitious Jewish interlocutors for the pride and superiority they imagine they have because of the Law when they feel to keep it; (2.17-24)
- ◇ insisted that "by the works of the Law, no flesh will be made right with God;" (3.19)
- ◇ claimed that a primary function of Law is to make sin known; (3.20) and
- ◇ epitomized faithfulness, not in the character of Moses, but in Abraham, precisely because God calls him righteous apart from circumcision and the Law. (ch. 4)

Now in Romans 7, Paul takes his teaching about the Law one step farther:

- ◇ our sinful passions are not remedied, but rather aroused by the Law; (7.5)
- ◇ a person who embraces Christ is "released from the Law" and has "died to the Law." (7.6)

In this way, he has likely raised the hackles of the Jewish Christians in Rome. It's no wonder, then, that Paul moves immediately from these last assertions to a rhetorical question on behalf of his Jewish Christian critics. Here's my expanded paraphrase of that question in Romans 7.7:

"So, Paul, you're telling us here that the Law arouses our sinful passions and that we are called to die to the Law when we are baptized into Christ's death. In chapter 6 you claimed that what Christians died to in our baptism is Sin. So...IS THE LAW SIN?!"

It's an understandable question, right? In his response to it, Paul will eventually say, "The Law is holy and just and good." But it's not the sort of holy and just goodness that his Jewish Christian friends likely expect.

With these introductions in mind, read Romans 7 for yourself and ask how Paul defends the Law. What allows him to call it good, yet call his Christians in Rome to die to it? It's not an easy read, but you can do it! And we'll walk our way through it together in class on Wednesday.

Two other questions will help you as you read.

What Is Sin?

When most of us think of the word "sin," we go right along with the Oxford English Dictionary's rendering of the definition:

"An act which is regarded as a transgression of the divine law and an offence against God; a violation (esp. willful or deliberate) of some religious or moral principle."

If you've ever confessed your sins (even if only silently), you've probably enumerated the times when your actions or thoughts have gone astray from God's way.

But Paul has a second use of the word, as a force or personality that draws us to such actions. As one of you brilliantly pointed out during the Session 4 after-party (a.k.a., Q and A Time), this way of thinking about sin shows up way back in the story of Cain and Abel, when God warns an angry Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4.7) As in Genesis 4, so in Romans 7, Sin acts. (My capitalization of the word is purposeful, because if this stretch of Romans were a play, Sin would be listed as a cast member.) Notice...

- ◇ Sin seizes an opportunity to produce in "I" all kinds of coveting. (Romans 7.8a)
- ◇ Apart from Law, Sin lies dead. (7.8b)
- ◇ When commandment came, Sin came to life, and "I" died. (7.9)
- ◇ "Sin...deceived me and...killed me." (7.11)
- ◇ Et cetera...

In Romans 7, Sin is an active player. That may seem weird to us but watch how Paul's usage works. The author counts on us to understand it that way.

Who Is "I"?

As you read Romans 7, a primary question will be, "Who is 'I'?"

Now, before the grammar police fire up their sirens and lights, let me clarify the question. "Who Am I?" is a moving poem by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pretty good song sung by Jean Valjean in "Les Mis," and very proper English usage for an existential question. "Who Is 'I'?" is not such good English, but it is the question that readers and hearers of chapter 7 have been asking, probably since Roman house-church goes first unrolled the scroll of this letter. They and we and a whole lot of folks between A.D. 57 and A.D. 2023 ask this because suddenly in Romans

7.7 the apostle shifts from his usual third-person description to a first-person report, and he stays there 'til the end of the chapter.

Paul turns into "I" immediately after the sort of rhetorical question that has grown familiar to us by now:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!

Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known Sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. (Romans 7.7-8 ESV – Capitalizations are mine)

Sleuthing out the identity of this "I" has long been an entertaining parlor game for New Testament geeks and theologians in general. But I don't want to be too flippant about this: getting the identity right is crucial to understanding all of Romans 5—8; so, friends, to repeat myself, Who Is "I"?

The list of most likely candidates is simple and short.

1. ***Saul of Tarsus, Pre-Christian.*** The most natural and first-instinct interpretation, when an author speaks in a first-person narrative, is to assume that the author her or himself is the "I" – that this section is in some sense autobiographical. This may be Paul's memoirs of his pre-Christian experience.
2. ***Paul, the Christian.*** Again, with the assumption that the "I" is Paul, it could be a reporting of Paul's struggle with the Law as a Christian.
3. ***A Pre-Christian Jewish Voice.*** Parts of this reflection make claims that don't fit well with the picture of Christian life that Paul has begun to paint in Romans 3.21—6.23. Perhaps Paul's representative voice is a general Jewish experience under Law.
4. ***A Faithful Jewish-Christian Voice.*** The content of this section grapples with the function of the Law of Moses, so this "I" could be a fictional Jewish-Christian moment of reflection on the conflict.

The question is important, partly because it tests our ability to look at this text to see what Paul is saying, rather than to interpret our experience. The first task of exegesis – of bringing out what the text says – is one that seeks an ancient answer. Through interpretation, we'll eventually get around to what this passage means for us. But the first-order business of the exegete is to listen for what it meant for Paul and the Roman churches.

Almost seventeen centuries of Christian tradition have seen the already converted, faithful Jewish-Christian voice here, whether Paul's own or Paul representing a class of people. (Options 2 and 4) They've read it this way, at least partially, because it reflects some of the challenges and frustrations, we all face when we set out to follow the way of Jesus. Martin Luther's

famous Latin characterization of baptized Christians – *simil justus et peccator* (at the same time both justified and a sinner) comes out of his commentary and lectures on this passage.

And let's face it, we can relate. I feebly quoted Frederick Buechner last session, when he acknowledges the plight of the well-intended Christian: "I know that the Old Adam and the Old Eve are supposed to have been drowned in the waters of baptism; but I find those two to be awfully good swimmers!"

Years ago, we Hiltons moved to a church in Seattle for me to become lead pastor. As we settled in, my beloved wife Liz wanted some company and support as we raised our 3-year-old and 1-year-old boys; so, she put up posters and started a group especially designed for parents of young kids. When it came time to name the group, her theologically-trained mind and her exasperated parent's heart came to an inspired choice "R719" – short for Romans 7.19. "The good that I wish I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." Scads of young parents joined us because the verse resonated with their experience raising children.

With all of this said, though, our first job in hearing Romans 7 is to hear the ancient exchange between Paul and his first readers in Rome. So read it with an eye for who Paul thinks "I" is and who his Roman audience would imagine he's talking about. Where does the frustrated experience of the "I" belong in Paul's "THEN vs NOW" sequence in Romans? Read with these questions in mind, then we'll talk about it on Wednesday!

Life in the Spirit

Friends, we now stumble upon an embarrassment of riches. Romans 8 is one of the great chapters in all of scripture. This 39-verse gem is worthy of an 8-week study all by itself. (It's no wonder Professor Luther's seminar on Romans was a three-semester class!) In it, Paul pictures for us the life that is offered to those who have died with Christ to an old self and been raised to a new life lived in the Spirit. The chapter has four main parts:

1. Walking in Spirit
2. Children of God
3. Suffering with Christ
4. God's Inseparable Love

I'll open each of these briefly here, and we'll expand on them Wednesday evening. As we begin our joyous trek through these glorious paragraphs, let's remind ourselves where the last words of Romans 7 left us. Paul summarizes the human plight under Law in this way.

*"So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind,
but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."*

With that as a lead in, listen to the good news of Romans 8.

Walking in the Spirit

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8.1-4)

In this explosion of life, Paul picks up the NUN (now) of Romans as we anticipated with our blessed *vuvì ðè* in 7.6. We have passed from then to now, and now is a sweet time to be! Paul proclaims that...

- ◇ We stand un-condemned, not because of our attainments, but because we are “in Christ Jesus.”
- ◇ We have been set free from the Law in the hands of Sin and death.
- ◇ All of this because God, by sending his Son, has done what the Law failed at: condemning (declaring condemned) sinful flesh;
- ◇ And that declaration made a path for a whole new way of walking in Spirit – a walk which, ironically, given the failings we observed in Romans 7, does finally, actually fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law.

Romans 8.1-11 declares God’s victory through Christ over the frustrations and exasperations of the old life, and it involves the indwelling Spirit. What flesh could not accomplish, Spirit has resoundingly done, and we can live free.

What’s better than this?!

Children of God

Paul will never go too far in his writings without returning to the significance of being in right relationship with God. Remember how Romans 5 began:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand

This Shalom with God, this right standing with the Creator, now shows up in Romans 8.12-17 as a parent-child relationship. The language recalls the baptismal references in Romans 6, but now with an emphasis on kinship.

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit

of adoption as children, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For Paul, the Spirit is a sign that we are God’s kids, and God’s kids live free in Christ through that Spirit. As we noticed last session, the first Christians baptized new converts “into Christ’s death” (down in the water) and raised them to new life (up into the air). As they emerged from the deep, gasping for breath, they said their first word in their new life, “Abba!” which is Aramaic for “Daddy” or “Father.” From their first breath in this new reality, they understood themselves as children of God and brothers and sisters with one another in the Spirit – all because they are all “in Christ.” Here, Paul reminds them of this relational impact of their baptism.

Amid all this celebration, the last line in this section shows us that Paul is not Pollyanna. In her 1913 novel by that name, Eleanor H. Porter introduced a character whose name would come to summon for us a sometimes-reality-denying optimism. Voltaire’s title character in *Candide* was also an optimist to a fault, who thought that he lived in “the best of all possible worlds” and couldn’t recognize the ample evidence to the contrary.

Paul has an undying hope. But hope and optimism are two different things, so now Paul leans into the part of this new, free, Spirit-infused, life as a child of God that will involve suffering. We are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8.17) In this way, Paul introduces us to the hybrid existence of the children of God for as long as we walk this earth. It is to this dual citizenship in the NOW and the THEN that he now turns.

Suffering with Christ

In Romans, we’ve seen our share of before-after transitions:

- ◇ the old life lived in the thralls of the human predicament versus the new life lived in a God-given righteousness through faith; (Romans 1.18—4)
- ◇ the old life lived presenting the members of our body as slaves to Sin versus the new life lived presenting our members as slaves to God; (Romans 6)
- ◇ the old life lived under Sin’s power exerted against flesh through Law versus a new life lived in the freedom of the Spirit. (7.7—8.11)

Now Paul does something different. Rather than dividing old from new, he gives us two phases of this new life, dividing the life of God’s children in the Spirit into two distinct epochs: this present time of suffering versus the final glory of the afterlife. Listen to verse 18:

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time (Gk NUN) are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

If any of us came in with the illusion that life as a free child of God, infused and empowered by the Spirit, means the end of all hardship, Paul disabuses us of it right away. “This present time” (our Gk friend NUN shows up once again!) is characterized by suffering – not only for the children of God, but even for all creation. Yes, the same creation that was ample proof of God’s existence and character in 1.18-20 makes a command appearance here, but now creation is groaning and suffering in solidarity with the children of God.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Like a pregnant mother whose time has almost come, creation suffers labor pains, ready to usher in a whole new future.

Our bird feeder is full this week. It’s cold in Austin, TX, and the red ones and yellow ones and gray ones and spotted ones are very grateful for the seeds we offer them, because life as birds can be barren when their customary food is frozen. After a recent ice storm, our beautiful cypress tree split in half. Since we’re reading Romans 8, I found myself this afternoon gazing out the back window and wondering if the bird and the tree feel those birth pangs. Paul’s poetic imagination opened that door for me and made me wonder what their version of anticipated glory is like. C.S. Lewis seemed keen on the redemption of all creation in the Narnia Chronicles, after all, and my sage, bearded college philosophy professor, Arthur Roberts, once insisted, when asked about heaven, “If my horse can’t go, I’m not going!”

Paul doesn’t often flash this sense of solidarity of all creation, so this is privileged access to his sense that we are all in this together – and, perhaps, that we’ll all be in glory together as well.

Of course, Paul next circles back to the reality of human suffering – even of the children of God.

We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
(Romans 8.23-25)

As glorious as this present walk of freedom in Spirit as children of God is, an unfathomably more glorious future awaits. In the meantime, knowing that glory lies ahead, we are equipped with hope to suffer patiently what Hamlet called “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”

Part of our present limitations for Paul is our remoteness from God. The one who reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13.11-12 that “now we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face” knows this sensed distance and the way it shows up in his Roman Christians’ (and our) efforts to pray.

We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And the God who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8.26-27)

This may come in handy the next time you find yourself having trouble praying. Paul says you have help.

I’m sure we will run into Paul’s next topic in our Q and A time for Session 5. It’s the only time in this book that Paul opens this issue of predestination that so occupied the minds of some of the Reformers. Paul mentions it here as a part of the good that God intends to do people who are God’s children through the Spirit – that children of God are joint heirs with Jesus.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

More about this on Wednesday. Warning: It is a can of worms that is very difficult to close again, once opened.

In this section of Romans 8, Paul acknowledges the not-yet-ness of our current status – that we live this present life leaning toward a next. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul corrects some brand new Christians who seem to be waiting on their roofs for the Second Coming of Christ. He tells them to work with their hands, to engage in the now time (to use Paul’s language here). With his language here, Paul does not mean to send people of faith to their rooftops, telescopes fixed on the clouds. He merely equips the children of God with a hope-filled patience to sustain them through what life in Christ sometimes requires.

Before we turn toward the transcendent last words of this chapter, it is worth remembering the *INCLUSIO* we noticed when we began reading chapter 5. Inclusion is a Latin word that means, as we would guess, “inclusion.” But it was used to describe a literary technique of starting and ending a section with some of the same words and concepts. In chapter 5, you’ll recall, Paul spun out the growth process that “the sufferings of this present time” offers:

Suffering → Endurance

Endurance → Proven Character

Proven Character → Hope

“And hope does not put us to shame,” writes Paul, “for the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (5.3-5)

Take a moment to notice how far you have come since this opening statement of the inclusion. Paul has introduced us again in 8.18 to the redeemable suffering 5.3 flashed, he has developed the essential role of the Spirit in guiding us through it, and now he will turn to the love of God “that has been poured out into our hearts.” Suffering, Hope, Spirit, Love. A deftly delivered *inclusio*!

The Inseparable Love of God

Paul’s remarkable last words in this section are worthy of full inclusion in this space.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul knows from experience what challenges befall even a people made new as children of God through baptism and infused with the Holy Spirit so that they walk free from condemnation. When it comes to opposition and misfortune, Paul knows whereof he speaks. He has himself faced the likes of “tribulation and distress and persecution and famine and nakedness and peril and sword.” So, this proclamation is not backroom theologizing, but rather is lived testimony. Paul has relied long and well on the God who has stayed with him through all of that suffering.

It is no wonder, then, that he is not “theorizing,” but rather “convinced” that none of those things – that not even the principalities and powers, and not even death itself – can separate God’s children from God’s love shown in Jesus.

More on Wednesday. For now...SHALOM!