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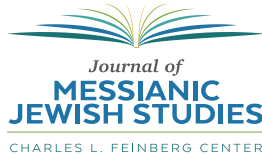
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## The Limitations of The Law

**Richard E. Averbeck**

The previous essay argues that the law, the whole unified Mosaic Law, always was good, and still is good (Rom 7:12-14), and it is profitable for the Christian (2 Tim 3:16-17). We must never compromise on this truth. This essay moves on from this foundation to another essential truth about the law. The Mosaic Law as good as it always was and still is, it always was and still is also “weak” (Rom 8:3). It has limitations. This does not make the law any less good, righteous, holy, and spiritual, but it does require that we also consider what it cannot do. How is the law weak? What are its limitations?

### YESHUA AS A SIN OFFERING

I have drawn the terminology for this discussion from Rom 8:3, “<sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh (lit., “in which it was weak through the flesh”), God



did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, . . .” Romans 7:14 anticipates this: “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” The real problem is with me and you, not the law. We are captured by our own slavery to sin, our “flesh” (v. 18, NIV ‘my sinful nature,’ lit. ‘my flesh’). No law, not even God’s law, can change a human heart. Law just does not do that. The Mosaic Law is a spiritual standard of life, but it has no power to make any of us spiritual. That requires the work of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit to push back against the sin filled “flesh” that each of us has operating within us.

The writer of Hebrews says something similar, but in a different way. The OT priesthood was Aaronic, but Jesus was a priest after the priestly order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:1-10 and 7:1-28). Since the priesthood changed, “<sup>18</sup> The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God” (Heb 7:18-19). The Mosaic Law regulations for sin and sacrifice made nothing and no one perfect. Hebrews 9-10 explains the difference between those sacrifices and the better sacrifice of Christ.

We cannot go into all the details of this here. In brief, the blood of the OT sacrifices cleansed the earthly tabernacle, while the sacrifice of Christ cleansed the tabernacle in heaven (Heb 9:11-12 and 21-24). The blood of the OT sacrifices cleansed the people “outwardly” (lit. ‘cleansed the flesh’), whereas the blood of Yeshua cleansed our “conscience” (vv. 13-14). The OT priests had to offer the same Day of Atonement sacrifices over and over, every year, but Yeshua offered himself as our sacrifice once and for all, and finally, at the consummation of the ages (vv. 25-28). On the one hand, the OT sacrifices could not make anyone “perfect,” as can be seen from the fact that they had to keep on

offering them (Heb 10:3; cf. 7:18-19 above). It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats take sin away permanently (v. 4). On the other hand, those who trust in the bodily sacrifice of Christ have been made permanently holy (vv. 5-10).<sup>1</sup>

All this brings us back to Yeshua as a “sin offering” in Rom 8:3. The atonement, cleansing, and forgiveness comparisons and contrasts between the OT sin offerings and that of Yeshua in Hebrews 9-10 are all based on the function of the “sin offering” in the tabernacle (and later the temple), through the year and on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 1-16). This is at the heart of the shift from the Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant. Yes, the OT system of offerings has been set aside, but not because it was not a good system in its day. It was ordained by God and accomplished what God intended for the ancient Israelites at that earlier time. Moreover, based on analogies to that system, we can understand what Yeshua did for us on an altogether higher level and once for all. We no longer need the repeated old sin offerings because Yeshua took us beyond them by becoming a sin offering for us that applies once for all and forever.

The OT sin offering regulations are not left behind, but taken further. It is not that we do not need a sin offering to make a way for us to draw near to God. We do! Yeshua is it. His bodily sacrifice brought the old system to completion and set it aside because it could never make anyone perfect before God. Only Yeshua as a sin offering could do that, and he did: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), but without the sin, so that he could be a “sin offering” for us to redeem us from our own sin filled flesh. In this way, “the

1 See Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church*, 199-205, and the more detailed discussion of Hebrews 9-10 in *idem*, “Sin offering,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2.101-103.



law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (v. 2). This “setting free” is the topic of Romans 6-8. It is the Holy Spirit who brings the sin offering of Yeshua to bear powerfully in the lives of those who come to God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

#### LAW AND SPIRIT IN ROMANS 6-8

It is the weakness of the legal stipulations by themselves, without the heart of faith empowered by the Holy Spirit, that Paul emphasized in Romans 6-8. The passage begins with three images: baptism, slavery, and marriage. Our baptism makes us dead to sin and alive to Christ (Rom 6:1-14). We are therefore no longer slaves to sin but to righteousness (vv. 15-23). We are no longer bound to the law as in marriage, but have died so that we are free (Rom 7:1-6). The law was and is absolutely good, but it is just as absolutely weak because it cannot motivate godly living. Instead, it incites sinful passions in the lives of corrupt people (Rom 7:7-13).

Interestingly, Paul uses the tenth commandment “You shall not covet” (v. 7) to help explain what he is getting at. Not even the Ten Commandments are “strong.” They are just as weak as every other part of the Mosaic Law. The tenth commandment is good and right, of course, not sinful, but the sinful flesh takes advantage of the law to produce all sorts of coveting (v. 8). So the law was intended for my good, to give me life, but it yields death instead (v. 9-11). The sequence here reminds one of the original fall into sin in Genesis 3: sin to deception to death (v. 11). We keep on replaying the dynamics of the fall. We inherited it, yes, but we keep on replaying it in our own lives too. After repeating the point that the law is holy, righteous, and good (vv.

12-13), we arrive back at the fact that the law is spiritual, but I am not (v. 14).

At this point the Apostle Paul begins his explanation of how tangled up we are in our own sin filled nature, our “flesh” (Gk. *sarx*; 7:18, 25; 8:3-9, 12-13). He begins, “15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup>And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (vv. 15-18). The passage overflows with frustration. There has been an ongoing debate among scholars about how to understand these verses.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars think it describes the experience of Paul and others in their unsaved condition, especially Jewish unbelievers. They want to follow the law, but end up frustrated, if they are honest about it. Other scholars take the view that this passage describes the experience of Paul and others as believers in Christ when they try to keep the law. Even when they try really hard, they end up experiencing their own corruption. They cannot get past their “flesh.” There are also some compromising positions. For example, some have thought this was the experience of a person under conviction for sin but not yet a believer. They are on their way to faith, but not there yet.

The debate continues, but, in my view, there is a better way to come at the passage. The use of “I” here is a rhetorical way to draw everyone into the passage, whether they know Christ or not. All people are fallen. Paul has been arguing about the way the law works by its very nature in the heart of fallen people.

2 See the extensive and helpful review of the debate in Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 466-75 who takes it to refer to unbelievers, and my own conclusion in Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church*, 293-97.



His argument continues in these verses. He is treating the law generically in terms of its inherent dynamic if one attempts to live rightly by means of it as their principle of life. That which is good (the law, 7:8-11, 13) becomes in the depraved human heart an occasion for the outworking of the dynamics of deception unto death (see v. 11 with Genesis 3). In other words, the law that is completely good and spiritual (7:12, 14a) is likewise completely weak and ineffective at making us spiritual (7:14b; cf. the remarks on Rom 8:3 and Hebrews 7 and 9-10 above). This part of the argument ends in despair: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (v. 24).

The argument then turns in the opposite direction. There is indeed an escape from the tangled up mess that we are: “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25a). Yes, when I seek to live by the Mosaic Law as my principle of life, I am a tangled up mess, but “. . . there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, . . .” (Rom 8:1). Aside from reference to the Mosaic Law (Rom 7:7-14, 22, 25; 8:3, 4, 7), there are at least three other “laws,” metaphorically speaking, that Paul is concerned with in Rom 7-8. First, there is the “law of sin (and death)” at work within me (7:23, 25; 8:3). The identity of this law is clear starting in 7:21, “So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” Second, this law is made manifest in the “waging war” (v. 23) between it and the “law of my mind” (vv. 22-23), which wishes to live according to God’s law and is enslaved by it (v. 25b). Third, victory and “freedom” in this waging war between these two laws is gained only by switching to another principle of law altogether, namely: “the law of the Spirit who gives life” (8:2). Paul develops this “law” in Rom 8:2-17.

The major turning point in this section of Romans is 8:1 is,

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. . . .” As Romans 7:14-25 describes it, our struggle with sin ties us into one big tangled up knot. One can feel this just reading the passage. Some readers may have heard the expression “cutting the Gordian knot.” It comes from a legend about Alexander the Great (300’s BC). There was a town named Gordius in the hinterlands named after its king, Gordius, and in that region there was a widely known oracle associated with a cart that was bound to a yoke with a knot that no one could untie. The knot was tight and had no ends visible. It was called the “Gordian knot.” The oracle stated that whoever could untie it would become the emperor of the Asian world. Alexander came up to Gordius in a campaign and learned of the oracle. His response was to draw his sword and cut through the knot with one fell swoop. Alexander, therefore, became the conqueror and ruler of all Asia, and we have the expression “cutting the Gordian knot,” referring to one drastic action that accomplishes everything that it necessary.

This is what God did on a cosmic scale for all eternity when he sent his Son to die for us. As our sin offering, Yeshua accomplished all we need to be right with the Father. As Rom 7:14-25 puts it, our lives are a tangled knot of sinful corruption. Romans 8:1 tells us that by one fell swoop God cut through the knot so that if we are in Christ we are under no condemnation as far as he is concerned. We can now move on in life, but along a different path. We don’t go back to try to untangle the knot, which would only get us all tangled up in ourselves again. Instead, we get on by the power of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit can do the very thing that the law cannot do; that is, the Holy Spirit works within us to change our heart so that we live by the good, holy, righteous, and spiritual standard of God’s law. The divine Holy Spirit testifies in and with the human spirit





of one who is in Christ Yeshua, so they are transformed by the “spirit of adoption” in our human spirit. We do life with God, as his adopted child.

#### THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

The point of all this is that we are captivated by our own depravity, and the OT law, as good as it is, cannot deliver us from that (8:3). This is what Paul means by the weakness of the law. There are basically three main steps in this passage overall. First, there is living under the condemnation of the law (Rom 7:7-25). Whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, this is the reality of life for those who live under the condemnation of the law, whether the Mosaic Law or the law of their conscience (see Rom 2:14-15). Second, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus because through him the law of the Spirit of life has set them free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-3).

Third, we can now get on with living our life by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit working a spirit of adoption in our human spirit, so that the righteous requirements of the law can be fully met in us (Rom 8:4-17). The Holy Spirit does this work in and with our human spirit amid all the struggles and contingencies of life in this fallen world. The constant goal is the will of God the Father to conform us to the image of his Son, Yeshua the Messiah, through all that happens in our lives (vv. 18-30). This is a Trinitarian work of God. All three persons of the Godhead are fully involved in this process in and among those who know Yeshua as their savior.

At this point it is important to attend to the meaning of “spirit” and the importance of the human spirit here and elsewhere in the Bible. Unfortunately, the human spirit has not received the

attention it deserves in our theological anthropology. Jesus drew upon it at the point of his physical death on the cross when he said, according to Luke 23:46, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (*pneuma*),” which is an expression from Psalm 31:5a, “Into your hands I commit my spirit (*ruakh*).” Jesus was referring to his own human spirit. The parallel in Mark 15:37 puts it differently, retaining the close link between “breathe” and “spirit” discussed above: “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last” (i.e., ‘breathed out, exhaled; expired’; Greek, *exepneusev*, related to *pneuma* cf. John 19:30). We learn from James 2:26, “. . . the body without the spirit is dead . . .” The human “spirit,” therefore, is the person who remains alive when the body dies.<sup>3</sup>

The Old Testament uses “spirit” (*ruakh*) for the human spirit about 120 times.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes it refers to the vitality of life: “the spirit of their father Jacob revived” (i.e., ‘became alive’ Gen 45:27b), when he heard that Joseph his son was still alive. Contrast Josh 5:1, when the people of Canaan “heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted in fear and they no longer had the courage (lit., ‘there was no longer *spirit* in them’) to face the Israelites.” Similarly, when the Queen of Sheba saw all of Solomon’s wisdom and his royal court, “she was overwhelmed”;

3 I will not engage here with the discussion in biblical anthropology concerning the two, three, four, or more elements that make up the human person. James 2:26 refers to the body and the spirit of the person. In other places, the two parts appear as body and soul (e.g., Matt 10:28). Still others suggest perhaps three parts (spirit, soul, and body; e.g., 1 Thess 5:23), or four (body, heart, soul, and mind; Mark 12:30), or five, with variations. In my view, generally, the terms for the “immaterial” person do not refer to different “parts” of us, but take different angles of view on what we experience in our inner person: cognitive, affective, volitional, and more.

4 See the more full discussion in Averbeck, “Breath, Wind, Spirit, and the Holy Spirit,” 29-31 and Richard E. Averbeck, “Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation,” in *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1:1 (Spring 2008): 30-33.



literally “there was no longer breathe (or ‘spirit,’ *ruakh*) in her” (1 Kgs 10:5b).

Sometimes “spirit” (*ruakh*) refers to moral or spiritual character: “My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my *spirit* longs for you” (Isa 26:9). Sometimes it refers to capacities of mind and will: “the skilled workers to whom I (God) have given wisdom” (lit. ‘a spirit of wisdom’; Exod 28:3). In other cases, it refers to a person’s disposition: for example, “if feelings (lit. ‘a spirit’) of jealousy come over her husband” (Num 5:14), and “their resentment (‘spirit’) against him subsided” (Judg 8:3). Proverbs 16:18-19 tells us a “haughty (‘high’) spirit” comes before a fall, in contrast to being “lowly in spirit.” Proverbs 17:22 refers to a “crushed spirit,” and, according to Prov 14:29, “Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered (lit. ‘short of spirit’) displays folly.” Many more passages in both the OT and NT could be cited and discussed, but this is enough for our purposes here.

Returning now to the argument in Romans 8, The translation of the Greek word “spirit” (*pneuma*), referring either to the Holy “Spirit” (upper case) of God or the “spirit” (lower case) of a human person is sometimes disputed in Romans 8:4-17. They are not distinguished in the Greek text, so it becomes a matter of contextual interpretation. In the NIV, Romans 8:10 says, “But if Christ is in you, then even though your *body* is subject to death because of sin, the *Spirit* gives life because of righteousness” (see similarly, e.g., KJV, NRSV, and ESV). NASB has human “spirit,” highlighting the correspondence between the human “body” and the human “spirit” in the verse, “If Christ is in you, though the body is *dead* because of sin, yet the *spirit* is alive because of righteousness” (NIV and NRSV put this rendering in the margin).

Similarly, in Rom 8:15 the NIV has “The *Spirit* you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the *Spirit* you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba, Father*’” (Aramaic *Abba* means “the father”). “*Abba, Father*” is the cry of a child who knows their father and cries out to him in confidence, joy, or need. The NIV capitalizes both occurrences of “Spirit.” The ESV has, “For you did not receive the *spirit* of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the *Spirit* of adoption as sons,” capitalizing the second but not the first. The NRSV rendering is “For you did not receive a *spirit* of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a *spirit* of adoption,” as does NASB, putting both in the lower case.<sup>5</sup>

The debate, however, ends in Rom 8:16, “The *Spirit* himself testifies with our *spirit* that we are God’s children” (NIV). The first *pneuma* clearly refers to the work of the Holy Spirit and the second says that the Holy Spirit does his testifying work with “our spirit,” referring to the human spirit. There is debate among scholars about whether “testifies with” (Greek *summarturei*) means that the Holy Spirit and human spirit both together testify to our adoption as the children of God, or whether the point is the Holy Spirit testifies to and assures our

<sup>5</sup> See the helpful summary of views in C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh & New York: T&T Clark, 1975, reprinted with corrections 2001), 1.390 and 396. Cranfield himself accepts “Spirit” in v. 10b and “Spirit of adoption” in v. 15b. Likewise, Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 550-52 and 560-67 argues for “Spirit” in all of vv. 10 and 15.

Robert Jewett, *Romans, A Commentary*, Hermenia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 491 remarks on the “bewildering variety of interpretive suggestions” that have been proposed for v. 10, but notes that most scholars see it as a reference “to the human spirit enlivened by Christ.” Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 697-99 and 703 accepts “spirit” in all of vv. 10 and 15. See more on this below.



human spirit that God has adopted us as his children.<sup>6</sup>

Both are true. When a person comes to Christ as his or her savior, she or he receives the Holy Spirit (see, for example, Acts 2:38-39 and 1 Cor 12:13). Within the person, the indwelling Holy Spirit works confidence in our human spirit from the start, and, furthermore, continues to convince and assure us of our adoption to God as his child from that point forward. As believers we are already convinced in our human spirit, and that conviction bears upon us as we go forward in life. The vicissitudes of life and our own temptations, weaknesses, and overall corruption, however, require the ongoing testifying work of the Holy Spirit in and with our human spirit, empowering our walk with the Lord.

The term “spirit” in the Bible when used for the human spirit refers to whatever is happening within the person. It can refer to anything we think or feel, our likes or dislikes, how we look at things, our view of events or people, whether of ourselves or others, our wisdom or foolishness, our state of being at any moment, whether gentle, fearful, powerful, perceptive, self-controlled, discouraged, in despair, or whatever. The main point here is that we have received the Holy Spirit within us; that is, within our human spirit. It is because of this that we can truly understand and take into our human spirit the reality of all that God has prepared for those who love him.

Like the wind, the Spirit of God is a powerful force, and it is especially in the human spirit as described above that God

6 Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1.403 and n. 1 argues forcefully for the view that the Holy Spirit testifies to our human spirit in the sense that it assures us that we are the adopted children of God (v. 16). Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 568-69 objects to Cranfield’s view and those who follow him, but, in the end, he admits that the “inner witness” of the Spirit results from this testifying (p. 569). This inner witness of the Holy Spirit in our human spirit was important in Luther’s understanding of the passage; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. xv, newly translated and edited by Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), 234-35.

intends us to experience the full force of the Spirit in our lives (Rom 8:15-16). The point of the direct contact between God and us is between God's Spirit and our human spirit. This is where and how the core of God's transforming work takes place in us. Jesus said it this way: "Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them" (Mark 7:15).

1 Corinthians 2:10b-12 draws out the correspondence between the divine Spirit of God and the human spirit of a person in a helpful way:

. . . The *Spirit* searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup> For who among men knows the thoughts (lit., 'the things') of a man except the man's *spirit* (lit. *the spirit of the man*) within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts (lit., 'the things') of God except *the Spirit of God*. <sup>12</sup> We have not received the spirit of the world but *the Spirit who is from God*, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (Greek *charizomai*, 'given by grace')

According to this passage, the "spirit" of the man knows the deep things of the man; that is, his inner thoughts, feelings, attitudes, etc. (v. 11a). Similarly, the "Spirit" of God knows the deep things of God (vv. 10b and 11b). Since believers in Jesus have received the Holy Spirit, we can understand "what God has freely given us" (v. 12); namely, what God has provided for us in our reception of the Gospel by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone (see the focus on the Gospel and the Spirit in vv. 1-10a).

## CONCLUSION

Christians are first of all and above all, worshippers. Worship is about getting impressed with God: who he is, what he has done,



and what he has done for us. The problem is that we are so often impressed with other things, and what we are impressed with is what we live for. This is why worship of God can be such a powerful transforming practice in our lives, perhaps the most powerful. The “spirit of adoption” that the Holy Spirit of adoption is working into our hearts and lives is all about being so impressed with God’s love for me that I think, feel, decide, and live based on it. Moreover, worship in the spirit of adoption is about seeing God while looking life squarely in the face. It is about becoming more and more impressed with him amid the ongoing groaning’s in our lives (Rom 8:18-30). We do not leave this worship behind as we face our issues and concerns in daily life. The Psalms make this clear. They are songs that come out of all kinds of experiences in life and take us to God from there.

This is what the last section of Romans 8 focuses on. Basically, it is like a worship song to the love of God in Yeshua our Messiah. This is the song God wants us to be singing in our human spirit. By the power of the Spirit testifying to our spirit (Rom 8:16) we can embody a “spirit of adoption.” The song begins with God the Father’s adoptive love to us: “<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31-32). God is not fickle. When he commits, he stays committed. It’s just the way he is. When we come to faith in God’s Son, God devotes himself to us in eternal love as an adopted child.

The song continues with Yeshua’s commitment to us as the one who stands in the throne room of the Father, speaking up in our defense. “<sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then

is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (vv. 33-34). The following verses elaborate on the love Yeshua has for us: “<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . .” (vv. 35-36).

It concludes with an elaborate declaration of our victory in Christ. No matter what is happening in our world and in our personal life, the spirit of adoption we are singing in our human spirit lifts us up. All sorts of troubles come at us from various directions, but can any of them undo or overcome God’s love for us? The answer is, “<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 37-39). This is the end of the matter. This is the song the Holy Spirit is working to produce in our human spirit. The “spirit of adoption” gets us caught up in the fact that we really are the adopted children of God, and of all things, heirs to the very Kingdom of God (Rom 8:16-17).

The Gospel is always good news to every one of us because, in our fallen condition, amid our groaning, there are always ways and places within us that the Gospel has not yet touched. We are still looking forward to glorification. We are not there yet (v. 30). In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is constantly working to see that all the nooks and crannies of my human spirit get occupied with this “spirit.” We worship God from here: there is absolutely nothing from anywhere or on any level in this entire cosmos that can separate us from the love of God. The more





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deeply and comprehensively we are convinced of this in our human spirit by the Holy Spirit, the more there is nothing left to do but go love God and people. Nothing else makes sense to me anymore! I lose track of the other things that tend to tangle me up in my own passions and the darkness and groaning of this world.