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The Evangelical Quarterly

APRIL 15TH, 1944

EXEGESIS OF ROMANS V-VIII

(concluded)

CHAPTER VIII. Let James Denney remind us that as ch. vi shows that in baptism the Christian dies to sin, and as ch. vii shows that such death frees him from the law (since a corrupt nature the law simply stimulates to sin); so in ch. viii we learn that this law-stimulated power of the flesh over believers is broken by the Spirit, who enables them to live unto God. Thus the impasse to Christian freedom, this misery of our deadly body, is eluded *through Jesus Christ our Lord*. With our minds we exchange our slavery to the flesh for slavery to the law of God, i.e. slavery to God Himself. The Spirit is the principle of righteousness and true life (*vv. 1-11*), being the Spirit of adoption (*vv. 12-27*), in consequence of which we are overflowingly assured of God's unchangeable love in Christ (*vv. 28-39*).

VII. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LIFE (viii. 1-11)

(*v. 1*) "There is no condemnation": nothing is a condemnation to those in Christ Jesus; such walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (this last part of *v. 1* is a scribal comment on the meaning of the absence of condemnation to those in Christ Jesus; but it is not in the best MSS., although it is a sound exegesis). (*v. 2*) We are no longer subject to the law of sin and death, our bondage is now to the law of the spirit of the life in Christ Jesus, which has liberated us from the old pernicious thralldom. Death hath no more dominion over us, therefore there is no place for condemnation. We have ceased to be wretched men, bound to our deadly bodies—thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ (*vii. 25*). (*v. 3*) The hopelessness of the law, i.e. what it could not achieve because the flesh cramped its style, was overcome by God Himself.

He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin ("as an offering for sin," R.V.?). In so doing God condemned sin in the flesh. Flesh was the realm of sin; but in the case of believers God put that sphere of influence out of court, the death of the Son annulling the power of sin over saints completely and permanently. Flesh was the realm of sin and that realm God crucified in Christ. Not merely was sin defeated in Christ's victory over it. In the Coming of Christ God doomed sin for ever, remanded all the reality of it to the realm of utter negation. Man in Christ is free for ever from the law of sin and death. The just requirement of the law (v. 4), a righteous life, is accomplished, not *by* us but *in* us. Demonstrably the Christian has ceased to walk according to the flesh; in Christ his spirit has been given the dominance. (v. 5) If our life accords with the flesh, the yellow streak will run through our mental outlook. If the spiritual element prevails, the analogous results will be seen in our spiritual alignments. Summing up in the words of v. 6 we declare succinctly that "the mind of the flesh is death, the mind of the spirit is life and peace". Why? (v. 7) "The mind of the flesh is enmity towards God, to whose law it is neither subjected nor can be. (v. 8) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God". The flesh, in other words, is the seat of revolt against God. Its very fleshliness is the state of open hostility towards God. (v. 9) But Christians are not in the flesh. If the Spirit is in them, they are in the Spirit; the Spirit of God dwells in them, has made their hearts His habitation. And the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of Christ. If we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of His. But (v. 10) given Christ dwelling in you, your body no doubt is dead on account of sin, but your spirit is life because of righteousness (or justification, the stupendous thing which God does for us, in the doing of which we ourselves have neither part nor competence). And of course such justification, the pure judicial assignment of righteousness to us on God's part, is the basis of such moral righteousness as results from receipt of the blessings of Christ. The statements made by v. 11 about the Spirit are analogous to those made by v. 10 about Christ; which makes the verses most important for the Trinitarian conception of God, so vital and indispensable to true Christian knowledge. And the Trinitarian atmosphere but emphasises the *revealed* nature of what St. Paul is here expounding: viz., its *inexplicable* factuality.

VIII. SONS OF GOD (viii. 12-27)

In vv. 12-27 we consider the nature of our ultimate obligations. Are these to our natural selves and our "fleshly" actions? Or to something other and better, the claims of which override those of our bodily, appetitive humanity? (v. 12) Christians as brethren have a real debt and responsibility to discharge; but not to the flesh. Our aim is definitely counter to fleshly living, living according to the flesh. (v. 13) So to live is to be about to die, without hope of any reprieve. But if by God's Spirit we put to death the actions of the body, we shall live a life over which death has ceased to have any dominion. (v. 14) Being led by God's Spirit we are God's sons; we hold a rank which entitles us to privilege. Compare St. Peter's designation of Christians as a royal priesthood, an holy nation (1 Pet. ii. 9). They have a natural kinship to God. (v. 15) In receiving God's Spirit, we are beyond the stage of reverting to a state of bondage to fear. We have been baptised. We have, that is, received the spirit of sonship to God. Instead of being slaves, we cry "Abba, Our Father". We are indeed the sons of God. Sonship means an adopted state, a position conferred upon one to whom it is not natural. It is by Christ's act of grace that Christians are in such a relationship. Yet this is no formal status; we receive the spirit of it: we *are* sons, with a right to say "Abba", as sharing the Sonship of the Eternal Son. (v. 16) So crying, our spirits receive the corroborating testimony of the Holy Spirit that we really are sons and so may confidently blazon the fact abroad, that we are really God's children. (v. 17) "And if children, then heirs"; the advent of the Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance (2 Cor. i. 22, v. 5; Eph. i. 14). Christ is God's Son and we are His fellow-heirs, "heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ". But consider the nature of the inheritance! We cannot share the glory without also first sharing the sufferings of our Master. The New Testament takes this for granted. And which of us can gainsay the proposition? (v. 18) The Apostle has no doubts about the "hardness" needed for following Christ. As little does he doubt that the glory to come will far outbalance the glory to be revealed to us here.

And now we come to see how everything combines to indicate such a consummation. There is creation itself groaning and travailing (vv. 19-22), in sympathy with the yearning hopes of

believers aroused by their possession of the firstfruits of the Spirit (*vv.* 23-25), and aided likewise by the same Spirit (*vv.* 26f.) to pray to heaven with a longing now articulate and divinely aided in its desire upwards. The Apostle reckons (*v.* 18) that the inevitable sufferings of this present time are simply not comparable with the glory certain to be revealed to us; literally, *upon us*. A light from without suffuses apparent tragedy. Creation itself is expectant of the revelation of the sons of God (*v.* 19). Reformed thinkers toy with the idea that sin affects the lower creation as well as man, and that the removal of the curse on the elect awakens reaction in non-human spheres, as if the ground cursed for Adam's sake longed also to be delivered simultaneously with the deliverance of men from their sins. Creation is, you may say, waiting and watching for the revelation of God's sons. At present it is in a condition of frustrated hope (*v.* 20), not of its own will but by the ordinance of God who subjects it. Yet there is hope from the same source. Man's redemption will somehow mean a lifting of the curse from the world. Here again Reformed theologians see the expectation of a new heaven and a new earth; not different, but a new creation *out of the original*, on a par with the second birth of the Christian. After all, the earth was made for man, and man he still will be after regeneration and complete sanctification. Hence (*v.* 21) this creature, too, *as well as man*, will be delivered from the servitude of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. The world change will match the bliss of redeemed mankind. Not as the poet says, "Death closes all"; though death is indeed the final claimant upon all life in a world of sin! Unredeemed humanity is truly enslaved: "vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." Christ lifts this curse from His own, and the whole creature shares in the release. "When man's redemption is complete, he will find himself in a new (re-created) world matching his new condition (Isa. lxxv. 17; 2 Pet. iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1); this is Paul's faith, and the sighing of creation attests it."

(*v.* 22) We Christians know—we could tell it from the O.T. in all the pronouncements of the LORD upon the backslidings of His people, His threats and visitations of punishment, in the reverse sentiments, uttered in the prophetic words of hope, of the desert blossoming as the rose, and so forth—we Christians are aware of the non-stop universal groaning and

labour of the whole creature; it is with us still, Christians though some of us are. Not only so (*v.* 23), but actually we Christians, who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit's regenerating power, also groan inwardly, among ourselves, in a like expectation to that of the visible world. We still look for the redemption of our body, to complete the renewal. Adoption must still proceed to its consummation. So we are prepared to suffer, as Christ also suffered; but we long to get it over. Hence the cry from beneath the altar, "How long, O Lord, how long!" Salvation pending the consummation is always real, yet still future. It is hope that saves us (*v.* 24), the hope that maketh not ashamed because sure and certain; but still hope straining after the consummation. If we could see it, it would not be hope. We do not hope for what is plain before our eyes. We *are* sons: but still we await adoption, in spite of our present privilege. We *are* saved; yet full salvation is on ahead. Hence the sighs and pangs of gestation. (*v.* 25) If we hope for what is beyond our range of view, our expectation of it involves patience. Cf. the faith, hope and charity verse, 1 Thess. i. 3, where the Apostle speaks of the *patience* of the hope; like that of the husbandman, who hath long patience for the fruits of his field: for him too it is GOD who giveth the increase in His own time. But God's giving to His "sons" is likewise sure; hence patience.

(*v.* 26) Similarly we have the Spirit to co-operate with our weakness(és). In our very longing and uncertainty we are not left without help. Though we know not what to pray for as we ought to, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unutterable groanings. Divine intercession gives utterance to our sighs, and the intervention prevails; our straining longing for the consummation is borne to the Father's throne. In the Spirit let us not fear to utter our dazed and upward sighings: God Himself in Christ will give them wings. And the Searcher of hearts (*v.* 27) knoweth the intention of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints *according to God*, in agreement with His will.

IX. ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE IN CHRIST (VIII. 28-39)

(*v.* 28) So in view of such divine working in us and on our behalf we are aware, that to them that love God all things

co-operate for good, i.e. to those who are the *effectually* called. It is the effectual nature of the calling, the eternal Will behind it, that enables the believer to be patient and to hope. What is established in the divine foreknowledge and foreordination inevitably reaches the divine goal for the divine glory, which includes the blessed state of the elect. This eternal purpose and plan (v. 29) is to make us conform to His Son's image [who is Himself the perfect image of the Father!], so that He is the firstborn among a host of brethren. Thus sublimely God induces in the elect the praise of the glory of His grace. Simply incomprehensible; yet through the Holy Spirit vitally real. St. Paul in two verses (29-30) goes through the stages of the divine decree and its accomplishment in space and time. The eternal order passed over into time and space is foreknowledge, foreordination; then (in time) calling, justification [by faith], glorification. The commentator has no thought of explaining away the eternal prevision, execution and control of the vast created universe, planned so meticulously that the very hairs of the saints' heads are all numbered. How could we have become conformed to the image of God's Son, without the divine command? In re-creation as well as in creation it is God alone who says, and it is so. And the *mystery* of even such Christian conformity, involving the marvel that the Incarnate (so it eventuates!) is actually the firstborn among many brethren? Quite incomprehensible; yet experientially plain and uplifting. Nevertheless *this* miraculous consummation planned in eternity is worked out in our believing hearts with the promise of an issue in the creature's praises in the state of glory. (v. 31) What shall we say to it all? What *can* we say? If God be for us, who is against us? Even the suffering of the Christian has its glorious outcome. Well, if God be for us, who is against us? Not the groans of creation, not the sufferings of the elect, not the strivings of the Spirit can black-out for us the prospect of heavenly hope. Think of God's sacrifice for us (v. 32). That lets us see how the providence of the Most High is dominant. He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for our sakes; if He gives us *Him*, He will not fail to give us the whole issue as well along with His Christ. God has never done enough for His own. Full measure and overflowing He pours His bounty into our bosoms. Christ is not enough; we are to have *all* His benefits, all the privileges of being His brethren. Who then

(v. 33) will bring a charge against God's elect children? God is their justifier: there is nothing in the record against any of them; they have a clean sheet. Who is going to condemn us? Is it Christ who died for us, or, rather, who actually rose from the dead, who is actually on God's right hand, who literally is interceding on our behalf? (v. 35) Who shall separate us from the love of God? Tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written (v. 36 quoting Ps. xlv. 23, LXX), "We are killed the whole day *for Thy sake!* We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter". I.e., we are Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture—why are *we* thus brought low? The tenor of the chapter shows that the Apostle understands the situation. It is precisely for God's sake that Christians suffer persecution, thus sharing in Christ's sufferings, in order that in due course they might share His glory. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth, and so do the Christians also. But really (v. 37), in all these things we are more than conquerors; our victory is a foregone conclusion through Him that loved us by His sacrifice. We suffer for His sake, because He suffered for us to make us partakers in His glory. Therefore with the Apostle (vv. 38f.) we are persuaded, in every detail of his utterance, that nothing whatever, far less tribulations and persecutions, can separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

And so justification by faith, that mysterious intra-divine transaction which makes us creatures righteous and transfers us to Christ's possession as His eternal possession, settles our destiny in eternity. We are saved and rejoicing in the hope of God's glory. Everything, especially affliction, is grist to the mill of our glorying in God. Christ has died to save us wretches and we *are* saved, and we glory in Him, and shall eventually reign with Him. The close of our little section of interpretation takes us back to its beginning: and faith is still assured, patient in suffering but rejoicing in hope and always relying upon the abundant preponderance of Christ's sacrifice in the scales of our ultimate assignment to glory at last, together with all the other saints.

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