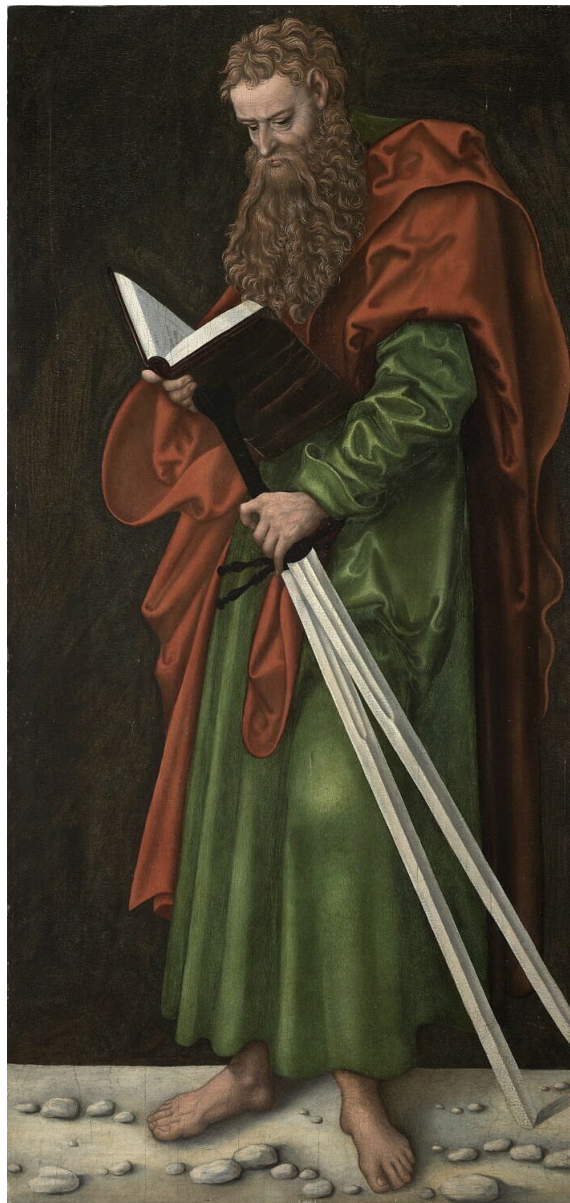


Comfort Beneath the Cross

Exegesis of Romans 8:18–39, with Special Emphasis on Election

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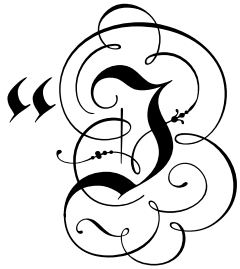


*Dona mihi, Domine Iesu,
ne facta formem,
sed ut factis former.*



*O Lord Jesus,
let me not shape the truth,
but let the truth shape me.*

The cover image is a painting of St. Paul by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), dated to the first half of the sixteenth century. Originally a triptych panel and a companion to a similar painting of St. Peter, it ended up in the possession of a Polish collector by 1927. Awarded to the Louvre in Paris in 1952, it was then deposited in the Anne de Beaujeu Museum in Moulins, France, in 1964, before being returned to the Louvre in 1987. Cranach depicts Paul holding a book in his right hand, showcasing his scriptural and general erudition, and two swords (though attached to a single hilt) in his left hand—a characteristic symbol for Paul. Explanations for the two-sword symbol include a) a strengthened allusion to “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6) and to God’s word as something “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Hebrews 4), perhaps with overtones of Paul’s claim that he worked harder than all the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:10); b) one sword for God’s word and another for the sword that beheaded him; and c) a representation of the two kingdoms—one sword for God’s word, the tool of the Church, and another for the physical sword, the tool of the State, the use of which Paul upheld (Romans 13). Though not a common explanation, for this paper focusing on the doctrine of election, it may be useful to think of the two blades attached to the single hilt as representing the distinct work the Holy Spirit accomplishes through law and gospel, respectively. Election is a gospel doctrine meant for believers. We run into error and go astray when we treat it as a law doctrine, mingle it with law doctrines, or use it to answer law-based questions.



n Romans 2, I just read that ‘God does not show favoritism.’ But isn’t election saying that God does pick favorites?”

A friend of mine, a pastor who teaches at one of our area Lutheran high schools, fielded that question from a high school junior about a month and a half ago. My friend rightly called it “a doozy.” On the spot, he handled the question pretty well. Among other things, he pointed the student to Matthew 22:14, “For many are invited, but few are chosen,” and said, “Look at the ‘many’ part. That’s God’s impartiality.” But later he shared the student’s question with me and asked, “Am I teaching election wrong?”

I’m sure the high school junior’s question sounds familiar to us. It’s basically another version of the age-old question: *Cur alii prae aliis?* Why some and not others? I’m sure my friend’s second-guessing of himself is also familiar to us. Are we teaching election wrong? And why did God make a teaching that seems to cause so many disagreements and to plant so many intellectual snags so prominent in his word?

Many discussions comparing dogmatics to exegesis and debating the relative merits of each are little more than both sides flinging their own feces at each other like monkeys. To actually understand the merits of each, first ask this question: Which came first—the doctrine we study in dogmatics or the written content we read and interpret in exegesis? Doctrine came first. The doctrine we study in dogmatics was in God’s heart and mind from eternity. But now the second, equally important question: How do we know that doctrine? Because of exegesis. The Spirit-inspired compositions that we do exegesis on are how God gave voice and form to the doctrine in his heart and made it intelligible to humans. Without exegesis, the doctrine in God’s heart would be useless to us, even as the whole point of exegesis is to discover and uncover the doctrine in God’s heart. Each sings the praises of the other; they do not play King of the Mountain with each other. Romans 8:18–39 therefore provides us with an opportunity to digest and discuss the doctrine of election, with its many attendant questions, in its divinely given form and context. As we study these verses, it’s as if the Holy Spirit has invited us to take a seat next to him in the safety and comfort of his own living room, to enjoy a fireside chat on some weighty doctrinal matters that have been on his mind from eternity, in front of his warm and inviting hearth.

Before I begin, I must give credit where it is due. In preparation for this assignment, I translated Georg Stoeckhardt’s (1842–1913) commentary on these verses.¹ Born in Chemnitz, Saxony, Stoeckhardt was educated in Erlangen, Leipzig, and Berlin. After serving as a pastor of a state church in Planitz from 1873–1876, he left the state church and joined Friedrich Carl Theodor Ruhland’s congregation, a charter member of the newly founded Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Saxony, and served as

¹ *Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1907), 371–415. I have provided my translation for download here: <https://redbrickparsonage.wordpress.com/2022/10/08/comfort-in-suffering-by-stoeckhardt/>. This is the version I will be citing.

Ruhland's associate pastor from 1876–1878. He immigrated to the United States in 1878, where he served as a pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in St. Louis and taught exegesis at Concordia Seminary (full-time beginning in 1887). He was the only German-university-trained exegete in the early history of the Missouri Synod, and his great learning and exegetical gifts were coupled with a firm, childlike faith. At Concordia Seminary he taught August Pieper and J. P. Koehler. The so-called Wauwatosa Theology those men came to represent must be traced in part to Stoeckhardt's influence, and it may be debated whether they met his standard. Stoeckhardt's unrivaled commentary on Romans is his *opus magnum*, and the fact that no satisfactory translation of it has yet been published is little short of a tragedy, whose remedy is devoutly to be wished.² While figuratively sitting at Stoeckhardt's feet, he introduced me to twenty-eight other commentaries on Romans, as well as a number of other relevant exegetical and doctrinal works, authored by theologians ranging from Augustine to Luther to Calvin to Estius to Meyer.

I will naturally, therefore, be leaning heavily on Stoeckhardt. And to the extent that I quote and borrow from other theologians, I will also be indebted to Stoeckhardt for introducing me to them.

Let us, then, take a closer look at Romans 8:18–39, focusing especially on the doctrine of election. Along the way, we will also have occasion to discuss other important matters, such as the question of renovation vs. annihilation on Judgment Day, abuses of Romans 8:28, and maintaining the distinction between law and gospel. The Holy Spirit has started a crackling fire, prepared us a chair, and poured us a drink. I know you all are already seated, but figuratively, have a seat. In the name of Jesus:

The Forest

When writing a Bible study, especially one involving the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, one can easily “miss the forest for the trees.” Let's not do that. In Romans 8:18–39, the apostle Paul gives us comfort beneath the cross—“the cross” here referring to the cross of self-denial and suffering appointed for each individual Christian (Mark 8:34–35).

Paul offers cross-bearing Christians a threefold comfort in this section. First, he comforts them with the *greatness* of the glory that shall be revealed in them on the Last Day (vs. 18). That greatness is proved by the fact that there is yearning and sighing for that glory a) by creation (*συστηνάζει*; vv. 19–22), b) by Christians themselves in their new

² In 1984, the Concordia Theological Seminary Printshop published an edition of this work in English, translated by Edward W. Schade and edited by Otto F. Stahlke. Although billed as “the complete text,” the translation is barely passable, contains abridgments, and only covers Romans 1–8, also leaving much to be desired in terms of formatting and source citation (the latter also being an issue in Stoeckhardt's original).

person (στενάζομεν; vv. 23–24), and c) by the Holy Spirit, as he intercedes on our behalf (στεναγμοῖς; vv. 26–27).

Second, Paul comforts Christians with the *certainty* of the glory that shall be revealed in them. That certainty is based on the fact that God has called them to faith by the gospel according to his own eternal plan (vs. 28). That plan began with him choosing them for himself and predestining them for glory from eternity (vs. 29). It then was put into effect in time when he called them to faith by the gospel and justified them through the faith he gave them, and his plan will certainly reach its goal when he glorifies them in heaven (vs. 30).

Third, Paul comforts Christians with an exultant exclamation of triumph and declaration of victory in response to the greatness and certainty of the glory that shall be revealed in them, and in the face of every potential enemy and threat to their salvation (vv. 31–39). Here Paul reminds us that our comfort beneath the cross is always founded beneath *the* cross and empty tomb of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our election, our calling, our justification, our glorification are all in Christ.

The Trees

THE GREATNESS OF OUR FUTURE GLORY (8:18–27)

Assertion (8:18)

Λογίζομαι γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς.

For I maintain that the sufferings of the present period are not equal in value to the glory that shall be revealed for us.

Paul had just written: “Now if we are children, then we are also heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (8:17). He now proceeds to expand on the coming glory that we children of God will inherit, precisely to motivate us to take up our cross and share in Christ’s sufferings willingly, and to comfort and strengthen us as we do so.

Paul comforts us beneath the cross, first, by emphasizing the *greatness* of the glory in store for cross-bearers. He does that by comparing our future glory with τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ, literally, “the sufferings of the now time.” Stoeckhardt states that Paul does not use an expression like “the sufferings of this age (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου),” but calls them “the sufferings of the now time,” to stress that “the time of suffering is a

brief, quickly-passing moment or period.”³ This is a valid observation, but one better derived from this context of comparison and from the word *καιρός* by itself, which always denotes a season or limited period of time, than from the phrase as a whole. After all, Paul also uses “the now time” in 3:26 and 11:5 simply to refer to the present, without any emphasis on its brevity. It also would not have occurred to him to use “of this age (*τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου*)” here, since he always uses that phrase in connection with the unbelieving world (1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 2 Cor. 4:4).

But let’s not miss the comparison. The sufferings of the present period “are not equal in value (*οὐκ ἄξια*)” to our future glory. Here Stoeckhardt nails it: “*Ἄξιον* is *quod lancem trahit*, that which balances the scale. If you set the sufferings of this age in one scale pan and the future glory in the other, the first pan snaps way up into the air.”⁴

We might expect Paul to introduce such a beautiful truth without *Λογίζομαι ὅτι*, “I maintain that,” which initially seems to move the statement from the realm of fact into that of personal opinion. But actually, the fact that *Paul* maintains this truth emphasizes its factuality all the more. Suffering is part and parcel of the calling to be a Christian and the calling to be a pastor, but it was a special component of Paul’s call. “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name,” the ascended Christ told Ananias (Acts 9:16), before he visited Paul and restored his sight. Paul cataloged his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23–33, stressing that, compared to anyone else claiming to be a servant of Christ (whether correctly or falsely), he had labored harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Not only that, but Paul had also been given a glimpse into the coming glory (2 Cor. 12:1–7). So when Paul says that *he* maintains that the sufferings of the present period are not equal in value to the glory that shall be revealed for us, his assertion actually makes us view the coming glory with more admiration and captivation than if we were comparing it to our own sufferings, or any other suffering we might be familiar with.

Still, how wonderful it is, whenever we are undergoing any struggle, discomfort, or pain for Christ’s sake, to realize that our future glory will far surpass it in joy and splendor. As bitter the tears here, so much greater the laughter there. As painful the suffering here, so much greater the exultation there. As shameful the disgrace here, so much greater the honor there.

The fact that the coming glory will “be revealed for us (*ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς*)” also comforts us. This glory is already ours in Christ now. On Judgment Day it will not come into being; it will be revealed.

³ Stoeckhardt, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:18

λογίζομαι	-----pres., mid./deponent, ind., first, sing.; <i>think, hold, maintain</i>
ὅτι	-----particle introd. an obj. clause; <i>that</i>
ἄξια	-----nom., neut., pl., adj.; predicate nom. in the obj. clause; <i>comparable, worthy, equal in value</i>
παθήματα	-----nom., neut., pl.; subject in the obj. clause; <i>suffering</i>
καιροῦ	-----gen., masc., sing.; gen. of belonging; <i>season, period, age</i>
πρός	-----prep. with acc.; prep. of comparison with ἄξιος; <i>to, in comparison with</i>
μέλλουσιν	-----pres., act., ptc., acc., fem., sing.; attr. adj.; <i>future, coming</i> (see also next entry)
ἀποκαλυφθῆναι	-----first aor., pass., inf.; inf. with μέλλω to form a periphrastic future; ⁵ <i>reveal; ἡ μέλλουσα δόξα ἀποκαλυφθῆναι, the glory that shall be or is going to be revealed</i>
εἰς	-----prep. with acc.; marker either of reference, <i>in, with respect to</i> , or of advantage, <i>for</i>

First Proof (8:19–22)

ἡ γὰρ ἀποκαταδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται. τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἔκοῦσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ' ἐλπίδι, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ. οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν.

For the suspenseful anticipation of creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons of God. For creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it—but was subjected in hope, since creation itself will also be liberated from the bondage of decay into the freedom of the glory of God's children. For we know that all creation has been sighing and groaning together up to the present.

The glory that shall be revealed for us is so much greater than the sufferings we must endure in this life. How do we know that? The first proof Paul gives for his assertion is the fact that all creation is eagerly waiting and sighing for the day our glory will be revealed. If all creation is anticipating our future glory with suspense, then it must be truly great.

“In this poetically phrased passage, the apostle [first] personifies creation”—what we commonly call “nature”—“by ascribing a waiting to it, and then, in order to

⁵ Smyth 1959.

strengthen his statement, he actually personifies the waiting itself.”⁶ It isn’t just that creation is eagerly waiting; “the suspenseful anticipation of creation” is eagerly waiting. Paul probably employs this two-layered personification both to make it clear that he is speaking figuratively and to underscore how wonderful the revelation of our glory will be.

However, Paul is only speaking figuratively in the sense that creation is not conscious of the coming glory like we are. Imagine if you had a giant tree growing right in front of a large window on the west side of your house, preventing you from seeing the sunset. So you finally called up a tree removal service and scheduled an appointment on a Friday to have it sawed down, sawed up, and removed. In the days leading up to that appointment, you told your neighbors, “Our living room window is looking forward to Friday.” You would be speaking figuratively, in that your window did not actually have any feelings about Friday. But your figure of speech would still be reflecting a truth about your window. Once Friday came, your window would experience, and be a medium for viewing, the sunset for the first time. The same is true here, only Paul’s figure of speech is even stronger, because many constituents of creation, the animals, are conscious, even if they are not specifically conscious about what is awaiting them on Judgment Day.⁷

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they became subject to futility, which Paul also calls “the bondage of decay” here. God had threatened, “On the day you eat of [the fruit of the forbidden tree], you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17). From the moment they sinned, they began to die, to progress back into the dust whence they came. Ever since then, the moment any of us humans begins to exist, the countdown to death begins. Why anyone outside of Christianity celebrates birthdays is beyond me. It’s like celebrating the minutes counting down on a timed explosive. But humans were subjected to futility willingly, in a sense. They knew God’s threat—Adam, because God had shared it with him, and Eve, because Adam had carried out his God-given role and ministered to his wife with God’s word—yet they still disobeyed God. They sinned “knowingly and intentionally...and thereby...willed their death and their destruction.”⁸

⁶ Stoeckhardt, 3.

⁷ Sometimes it is simply asserted that animals do not have a soul, as opposed to humans. But while this may help to express a truth in a simplified way, it is not technically true. The original Hebrew of Genesis makes it clear that the animals also have a soul. נִפְשׁ תַּיִם is used to describe both their life principle (Gen. 1:20, 24, 30) and ours (Gen. 2:7). This is also clear in the type of life that the animals lead and in the ways that we are able to interact with them—an interaction we cannot enjoy with other life forms. The difference between animals and humans should not be located in the presence or absence of a soul, but in the *type* of soul given to each. Only to humans did God give a soul created in his image. Even after the fall into sin, this special characteristic is evident in the fact that every human soul always carries on its existence in a special relationship with God—either in opposition to him, as his enemy (the default), or in harmony with him, as his friend. The animals all live outside of any such relationship.

⁸ Stoeckhardt, 3.

But in order to keep his threat against mankind, God also subjected all creation to the curse of death and destruction. The non-human constituents of creation were unwilling recipients of God’s curse. They also had to pay the price for our sin, even though God’s prohibition and attendant threat were not directed at them and they played no active role in its violation.

As a result, “all creation has been sighing and groaning together up to the present.” “All creation is, as it were, performing a great sighing symphony together.”⁹ A life subject to futility, a life enslaved to decay, is a hard life, including for irrational animals and inanimate vegetation. And Paul says that “we know (οἶδαμεν)” this. We usually think of οἶδα as denoting head knowledge, and γνώσκω experiential knowledge, but here is a place where those semantic borders are not so fixed. The context demands that the knowing here be at least partially experiential, and we have, in fact, experienced it. “Everywhere we have images of death and decay before our eyes. The scourge of sterility, the fury of the elements, the destructive instincts of the wild animals, the very laws that govern plant life—all of it casts a gloomy shadow over nature.”¹⁰ “[Nature’s] entire existence...is permeated with a pain showing itself in the various manifestations of its life—the pain of an anxiety-filled wrestling with the ever-lurking danger of death.”¹¹

Whichever way we turn, there we can observe how creation struggles against decay and destruction and experiences pain over it. The worm squirms in the dust when it is trampled. Fattened animals writhe and bellow under the butcher’s knife. Whoever knows how to tune into the various manifestations of life in nature hears everywhere either a loud plaintive and painful cry [συνωδίνει] or a subdued whimpering, moaning, and sighing [συστενάζει].¹²

If you’re a Christian fisherman and hunter, as I am, and you derive absolutely nothing but enjoyment from it, then you’re not yet as tuned into this truth as you ought to be. When was the last time a deer, a duck, a pheasant, a rabbit, or a fish truly had a moment’s rest? When was the last time they had absolutely no thought of the threat of death? They are always moving, always on the alert. Enjoy your hunting and fishing, but at the same time realize: This is not the way it was meant to be. The same applies if you are fascinated by powerful, destructive meteorological phenomena. This is not the way it was meant to be.

Nor is it the way it always will be. Many like to interpret ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι ὅτι as “in the hope that.” But ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι is a self-contained adverbial expression best taken with τῆ

⁹ Philippi, 362.

¹⁰ Reuss, 81.

¹¹ Hofmann, 335.

¹² Stoeckhardt, 6.

ματαιότητι ἢ κτίσις ὑπετάγη (“creation was subjected to futility”), and in fact is the emphasis of that sentence—“creation was subjected to futility...[but was subjected] in hope.” Plus, if one translates, “creation was subjected to futility...in the hope that creation itself would also be liberated,” then it inappropriately sounds like *God* was the one hoping. (It would still sound that way even if it read: “...in the hope that *it* itself would also be liberated.”) Correct me if I’m wrong, but I am unaware of any instance of hope being predicated of God. No, God subjected creation to futility, but in hope, namely hope for creation.

What is creation’s hope? “[Creation was subjected] in hope, since creation itself will also be liberated from the bondage of decay into the freedom of the glory of God’s children.” Note the two important prepositional phrases, which “clearly indicate the transferring of creation *from* one condition *into* a different condition.”¹³ Creation will be liberated *from* (ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπό) the bondage of decay *into* the freedom (εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν) of the glory of God’s children, namely believers.

Here is where we need to ruffle a few feathers. One of the books in the People’s Bible Teachings series—a book that is otherwise a *tremendous* resource and one of the best, if not the best, book in the series—has a section titled: “Will the earth be annihilated or renovated?”¹⁴ Even though the author cites this passage from Romans 8 in favor of renovation and says that he personally has “more sympathy with the idea of reconstructionism,” that is, renovation or transformation, he still affirms: “The question is recognized as an open question, not conclusively decided in Scripture. So one opinion is as valid as the next.”¹⁵ I don’t know how a person can do serious exegesis of this section of Romans 8 and come away with that viewpoint. The passages the author cites there that are supposedly in favor of annihilation can all be explained in terms of renovation, but this passage simply will not admit of any annihilationist interpretation. The point of this section—creation waiting and sighing for the revelation of the glory of God’s children, which will also entail its own liberation—and the point within the broader context—creation’s waiting and sighing being an indication of how great our future glory must be—are both lost if creation as we know it now will be completely annihilated on Judgment Day.

The explanation given here, the assumption of a future transformation and glorification of creation, is the one consistently found with the church fathers, likewise with most of the Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century in their commentaries on Romans (e.g. Luther; Melancthon; Körner, a co-author of the Formula of Concord; and Brenz), in old study Bibles, like the Altenburg Bible of 1676, and finally with the vast majority of Bible-believing exegetes of modern times. The dogmaticians of the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ Nass, 189–91.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

seventeenth century, who interpret the liberation of creation from the bondage of transitoriness as the annihilation of creation, by appealing especially to 2 Peter 3, necessarily do violence to Paul’s words. ... [W]hy would the fire that Peter writes about absolutely need to be taken as an annihilating fire? No earthly fire is an annihilating fire in the proper sense of that word; it does not completely eliminate the matter that it burns.¹⁶ The fire of hell does not annihilate the existence of the damned. So too, the effect of the fire on the Last Day does not necessarily have to be a *redactio in nihilum*, a reduction to nothing. The melting away, the dissolving of the old heavens and old earth in fire corresponds rather to the dying, perishing, and disintegration of the human body, which will nevertheless be restored to life from the dust, from its residual particles.¹⁷

The nagging question left unanswered in this view is how then the already departed souls of believers are enjoying heaven. But we are better off chalking that up to our living within the realm of time and mortality and thus being unable to fully grasp eternal things, than we are flying in the face of Paul’s clear words.¹⁸ Another question left unanswered, though hardly nagging, is: What will life in the renovated and transformed heavens and earth be like? If I enjoy fly fishing for trout in a shimmering mountain stream now, what will heaven be like?¹⁹ In an effort to help us anticipate this glorious event, Luther, who was definitely a renovationist, surmised

¹⁶ Wildfire, in fact, “plays a key role in shaping ecosystems by serving as an agent of renewal and change” (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/page/fire-effects-environment>; accessed Oct. 13, 2022).

¹⁷ Stoeckhardt, 6–7.

¹⁸ Perhaps this view actually helps us to better understand “the intermediate state” of the departed souls of believers that Nass handles so well elsewhere in his book (204–5). They are still in the presence of the glorified Christ, so they are truly in heaven, but there is also an even better heavenly existence to look forward to (in addition to the reunification with their bodies), in the new heavens and the new earth. Perhaps this is somewhat akin to the difference between “good” and “very good” in the creation account.

¹⁹ Perhaps here might also arise the popular question: Will my pet(s) be in heaven? Paul’s teaching of renovation certainly supports the idea of animals, including pets, in heaven. Some of the angels already have the appearance of animals (Ezek. 1; Rev. 4; cp. esp. Ezek. 1:10 to 10:14, which suggests that all ordinary cherubim have the appearance of an ox). But as to whether *our pets on earth* will join us in heaven, in addition to what was said in fn. 7, this question seems to be definitively answered in Job 1 and 42. Job 42:10 explicitly tells us that the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Yet when comparing the numbers in 42:12–13 to those in 1:2–3, we find the number of domestic animals to be double, but the number of humans, sons and daughters, to be identical. Why? Because Job had not actually lost his original sons and daughters for good—they were in heaven—whereas he *had* lost his domestic animals for good.

that a person will say, “Now *this* is truly a beautiful sun,²⁰ a fine, handsome tree, an exquisite, lovely flower,” and so on. Now since this, I say, is our hope, should we be so arrogant and make such a big deal out of the modest suffering that we may encounter in this life? For what is it, really, compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us?²¹

And everything in this new heavens and new earth will be, like us, free from futility, transitoriness, and corruption. As the apostle Peter says, our inheritance will never deteriorate or diminish in substance, will be completely without blemish or defect, and will never diminish in quality (1 Pet. 1:4). What a freedom for creation to look forward to! What a freedom for us to look forward to! How much greater this freedom than the pain of our sufferings in the present!

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:19–22

- ἀποκαραδοκία* -----nom., fem., sing.; compound noun from *ἀπό*, *κάρα* (*head*), and *δοκέω* (*expect, imagine*); the *ἀπό* in compounds like this has the sense “of someone being completely lost in something or completely wrapped up in it”;²² “*καραδοκεῖν* means to look out into the distance with a stretched-out neck, thus with bated breath and with yearning”;²³ subject; *eager expectation, suspenseful anticipation*
- κτίσεως* -----gen., fem., sing.; subjective gen.; *creation* (in the sense of “that which is created”)
- ἀπεκδέχεται* -----pres., mid./deponent, ind., third, sing.; compound verb from *ἀπό*, *ἐκ*, and *δέχομαι* (*wait*); see *ἀποκαραδοκία* above for *ἀπό*; *ἐκδέχομαι* (*expect*) is already an intensification of ordinary waiting; main verb; *eagerly await*
- ματαιότητι*-----dat., fem., sing.; dat. with *ὑποτάσσω*; *futility, transitoriness*
- ὑπετάγη*-----second aor., pass., ind., third, sing.; main verb; *subject*

²⁰ Perhaps bringing the sun into the picture wasn’t the wisest idea, since the apostle John tells us that “the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Rev. 21:23). Earlier in the sermon, Luther says, “The sun is nowhere as beautiful, bright, and clear now as it was in the beginning when it was created. No, on account of humans it is certainly half dark, rusty, and sullied.” Though his focus on the sun is probably ill-advised, the idea of creation now being “half dark, rusty, and sullied,” compared to what it was and what it will be, is worth reflecting on.

²¹ St. Louis Edition 12:731. This is excerpted from the two sermons on Romans 8:18–22 that Luther preached for the morning and afternoon services, respectively, on June 20, 1535. These were eventually prepared for print by Caspar Cruciger and included in his 1544 Summer Postil. They were then included in editions of Luther’s so-called Church Postil. For English translations, see Lenker and Mayes in the Bibliography. The translations here and in fn. 20 are my own.

²² Hofmann, 329.

²³ Stoeckhardt, 3.

ἐκοῦσα -----nom., fem., sing., adj. of ἐκών; pred. adj. as adv.;²⁴ *willing, glad*
 διά -----prep. with acc.; *because of, on account of*
 ὑποτάξαντα -----first aor., act., ptc., acc., masc., sing.; attr. subst.; obj. of διά; *subject*
 ἐλπίδι -----dat., fem., sing.; obj. of ἐπί; *hope*
 ἐλευθερωθήσεται -----first fut., pass., ind., third, sing.; main verb in subordinate clause;
set free, liberate
 φθορᾶς -----gen., fem., sing.; gen. of apposition; *deterioration, corruption,*
destruction
 ἐλευθερίαν -----acc., fem., sing.; obj. of εἰς; *freedom* (referring back to ἐλευθερωθήσεται)
 δόξης -----gen., fem., sing.; gen. of apposition; *glory*
 συστενάζει -----pres., act., ind., third, sing.; compound verb from σύν and στενάζω;
 main verb in ὅτι object clause; *sigh together, in common*
 συνωδίνει -----pres., act., ind., third, sing.; compound verb from σύν and ὠδίνω
 (*have labor pains, experience violent pain*); main verb in ὅτι object
 clause; *suffer violent pain together, groan together, in common*
 ἄχρι -----prep. with gen.; *until*

Text-Critical Note

In verse 21, Uncials **Ⲙ** and **D** and a couple ninth century uncials read διότι instead of ὅτι. While this reading is clearly not the original, it does likely show that those involved in the transmission of these manuscripts understood ἐφ' ἐλπίδι in verse 20 as an adverbial phrase with ὑπετάγη and this verse as an expression of cause. Some of these copyists may have even switched the conjunction intentionally, detecting the potential confusion.

Second Proof (8:23–25)

οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἱοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν. τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν· ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς· ὃ γὰρ βλέπει τίς ἐλπίζει; εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ βλέπομεν ἐλπίζομεν, δι' ὑπομονῆς ἀπεκδεχόμεθα.

Not only that, but we, too, since we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also sigh within ourselves in eager anticipation of adoption, the redemption of our body. For it is in hope that we are saved. And hope that is seen is not hope. Who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly await it through patient endurance.

²⁴ Smyth 1043.

The glory that shall be revealed for us is so much greater than the sufferings we must endure in this life. How do we know that? The first proof Paul gave for his assertion is the fact that all creation is eagerly waiting and sighing for the day our glory will be revealed. The second proof he now gives is that fact we ourselves also sigh and yearn for it in our new, Spirit-inhabited person.

The “Not only that” clause refers to the collective sighing of creation. Just as all of creation sighs, so also we sigh, we Christians who have the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Many expositors take the genitive τοῦ πνεύματος in the expression τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος as a partitive genitive. Some of those... understand the firstfruits of the Spirit to mean the Spirit that the apostles and early Christians in general received, in contrast to the Spirit that the later generations of Christians supposedly received. But no such distinction can be found anywhere else in the New Testament. When the apostle says ἡμεῖς, “we,” he is speaking on behalf of Christians of every age. Others... contrast the firstfruits of the Spirit—that is, the share of the Spirit that we receive here on earth—with the full harvest or full measure of the Spirit we will receive in the world to come. But the blessing of eternal life is never defined as a full outpouring of the Spirit anywhere else in the New Testament. In our passage, what we Christians are still waiting for is called *υἰοθεσία* and *ἀπολύτρωσις*. In the first half of Chapter 8, Paul simply said that the Spirit of God dwells in us and that we have the Spirit of Christ. It would be a completely new and strange idea, that we initially have only a portion of the Spirit.

We therefore take τοῦ πνεύματος as a genitive of apposition... Since the Spirit comes from the other world, we Christians, we who have the Spirit, possess in and with the Spirit the firstfruits of the world to come, the firstfruits of heavenly glory. Because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we already carry a piece of heaven in our hearts, so to speak.²⁵

In spite of this skillful interpretation by Stoeckhardt, however, I can’t help but question his interpreting ἔχοντες concessively—“*even though* we possess the firstfruits of the Spirit.”²⁶ This interpretation puts a negative slant on our sighing: Even though we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we still sigh in pain and disappointment. That might seem to fit with how it was used in the previous sub-section, to describe creation’s sighing and groaning in pain from its bondage of corruption. And certainly there would be no sighing if there were no pain and suffering. But even in the previous sub-section, the sighing was not just an expression of pain, a sighing *from* something, but also an anticipation of something good, a sighing *for* something. In this section, the idea of sighing *for* something seems to predominate even more clearly, especially since it is followed by *υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι*, “eagerly awaiting adoption.” The interpretation, “Even though we possess the firstfruits of the Spirit, we still sigh in struggle and pain as we eagerly await adoption,” would put the emphasis on our present struggle and pain,

²⁵ Stoeckhardt, 10–11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

even though the emphasis in this sub-section and in the larger section is on our glorious hope, the greatness of our future glory. Also, in the next sub-section, the Spirit does the sighing, and there Paul focuses even more clearly on the Spirit sighing *for* the consummation of our salvation.

I therefore prefer to understand ἔχοντες causally. We ourselves also sigh in eager anticipation of our adoption precisely because we possess the Spirit through faith in Christ, and precisely because, in possessing the Spirit, we possess the firstfruits of heavenly glory. We already carry a piece of heaven in our hearts, so we have a small foretaste of what awaits us. This, too, gives us an idea of how great our future glory is.

“We ourselves also sigh within ourselves as we eagerly await adoption, the redemption of our body.” Note that υἰοθεσία, “adoption [as sons],” here alludes back to ἡ ἀποκάλυψις τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ in verse 19. God’s revealing of all his sons before the eyes of all on Judgment Day—“sons” used here, instead of “children,” in reference to the inheritance rights of sons in Old Testament Israel, but including both male and female believers—will be the ultimate “placement as sons” (υἰοθεσία). But even if we didn’t have that connection to verse 19, Paul himself explains what he means by “adoption” here with an appositional phrase—“the redemption of our body,” that is, the resurrecting of our body from the dead and its reunification with the soul in glory for eternity.

But what is Paul seeking to explain when he continues, τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν, “For it is in hope that we are saved”? The definite article here could be a generic article, denoting hope as a genus or class, as opposed to the genus or class of sight or some other sensory experience. To paraphrase: “We ourselves also sigh in eager anticipation of our adoption. For it is in the thing called hope that we are saved.” Or the definite article could be an article of previous reference, referring back to ἀπεκδεχόμενοι. To paraphrase: “We ourselves also sigh in eager anticipation of our adoption. For this is precisely the hope in which we, and all Christians, are saved.” Either way, Paul is alluding back to our eager waiting and anticipation of our future glory as a *sine qua non* of our Christian faith. No Christian is saved, brought to the faith, in such a way that he immediately experiences his consummate adoption, the redemption of his body. From the first moment they become Christians, Christians are Christians in hope, the hope of a blessed and glorious reality yet to come. You wouldn’t join such a movement or accept such a body of truth if this were not an attractive prospect that made your present suffering more bearable, and if that is the case, this attractive prospect must be truly great. Yes, you did not join that movement and accept that body of truth by your own native powers; the Holy Spirit drew you to it. But that strengthens the case. It is precisely the Holy Spirit dwelling in you through faith that makes the prospect of heavenly glory attractive, precisely because that’s his home, that’s where he comes from. The pleasantness, joy, and comfort of his dwelling within you is precisely what clues your soul into the fact that his home must be a truly glorious place.

Paul now diverts from the main progression of thought a bit. He digresses on the topic of hope, in yet another inspired attempt to motivate us to bear our cross willingly: “And hope that is seen is not hope. Who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly await it through patient endurance.” We often talk about how Christian hope is different from earthly hopes, like hoping for good weather, good grades, safe travels, or a victory for a certain sports team. These are all nothing more than optimistic, but unguaranteed wishes, whereas Christian hope is sure and certain. So then, why use the word *hope*? Because there is still a factor that unites both Christian hope and earthly hopes—their object is something unseen, unrealized. “Hoping and seeing are mutually exclusive. When seeing begins, then hope is at its end.”²⁷ You don’t hope for a victory for a sports team after they have already won the game in question. You cannot hope for good weather on opening day of the 2022 pheasant season in South Dakota anymore. Last Saturday has already come and gone.

But precisely because it is a sure and certain hope, and precisely because it is unseen, there is only one way for us Christians to wait for what we hope for. Imagine if you lived in the days before internet, telephone, or telegram, and you placed an order by post with a company overseas for a beautiful artifact you had never seen but only heard about from reliable friends. You had absolutely no way to confirm or track the acceptance, processing, or shipping of the order. You simply had the testimony of reliable friends that you would eventually receive what you had ordered and that it would be worth the wait. You would be eagerly hoping for the arrival of that order every day after placing the order, but there would only be one way to wait for it—patiently. If you lost your cool and blew up at some point, those around you would have every right to say, “What’s wrong with you? What did you expect? This is exactly the type of order you placed. It will get here when it gets here. In the meantime, you have no control over it.”

In a similar way, Paul reminds us that we were brought into a glorious hope when the Holy Spirit brought us to faith. But because it is a hope, it is as yet unseen, unrealized. Precisely for that reason, there is only one way to eagerly wait for it—through patient endurance (ὕπομονή). It will certainly not fail to appear, but only when God determines.

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:23–25

ἀπαρχήν -----acc., fem., sing.; obj. of ἔχοντες; *firstfruits* (here used in a similar way as ἀρραβών, *down payment*, in Eph. 1:14 and 2 Cor. 1:22)

ἔχοντες -----pres., act., ptc., nom., masc., pl.; circumstantial, causal; *have*

στενάζομεν -----pres., act., ind., first, pl.; main verb; *sigh*

²⁷ Stoeckhardt, 13.

υιοθεσίαν	-----acc., fem., sing.; compound noun from υἰός and θέσις (<i>placing</i>); obj. of ἀπεκδεχόμενοι; <i>adoption</i>
ἀπεκδεχόμενοι	-----pres., mid./deponent, ptc., nom., masc., pl.; circumstantial, manner; <i>eagerly await</i> ; στενάζομεν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, <i>we sigh as we eagerly await, we sigh in eager anticipation of</i>
ἀπολύτρωσιν	-----acc., fem., sing.; appositive to υιοθεσίαν; <i>redemption</i> (in the sense of release or deliverance from a captive condition)
σώματος	-----gen., neut., sing.; objective gen.; <i>body</i>
ἐλπίδι	-----dat., fem., sing.; dat. of manner; <i>hope</i>
ἐσώθημεν	-----first aor., pass., ind., first, pl.; either complexive (action regarded as a whole: “it is in hope that we were/have been saved”) or gnomic (action valid for all time: “it is [always] in hope that we [Christians] are saved”); main verb; <i>save</i>
βλεπομένη	-----pres., pass., ptc., nom., fem., sing.; attr. adj. with ἐλπίς; <i>see</i>
δι’	-----prep. with gen.; abbrev.; marker of prevailing circumstance or manner in which something is accomplished, <i>through, with</i>
ὑπομονῆς	-----gen., fem., sing.; compound noun from ὑπό (<i>under, beneath</i>) and μονή (<i>remaining</i>); obj. of διά; <i>patience, endurance, patient endurance, perseverance</i>

Text-Critical Note

In verse 24, a number of significant witnesses to the text read: ὁ γὰρ βλέπει τις, τί καὶ ἐλπίζει; “For what a person sees—why is he also hoping for it [*or why would he also hope for it*]?” Ultimately, this is only a wordier version of the same question discussed above, and it leads us to the same understanding of the text.

Third Proof (8:26–27)

Ἵσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα συναντιλαμβάνεται τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ ἡμῶν· τὸ γὰρ τί προσευξώμεθα καθὸ δεῖ οὐκ οἶδαμεν, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερεντυγχάνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις· ὁ δὲ ἔραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας οἶδεν τί τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος, ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἁγίων.

The Spirit also does likewise in assisting with our weakness. For we do not know how to pray in a fitting way, but the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with indescribable sighs. And the One who searches hearts knows what is on the Spirit’s mind, because he intercedes on behalf of saints in a God-conforming way.

The glory that shall be revealed for us is so much greater than the sufferings we must endure in this life. How do we know that? The first proof Paul gave for his

assertion is the fact that all creation is eagerly waiting and sighing for the day our glory will be revealed. The second proof he gave is the fact that we ourselves also sigh and yearn for it in our new, Spirit-inhabited person. The third proof he now gives is the fact that the Spirit himself also deeply sighs for this glorious goal in his intercession for us. The Spirit would not desire this glory for us so intensely and assist us in longing and asking for it, if it were not exceedingly great.

With the adverb *ᾠσαύτως*, Paul alludes back to the *συστενάζει* of verse 22 and the *στενάζομεν* of verse 23. *ᾠσαύτως* shows us that Paul is building up to the *στεναγμοῖς* at the end of verse 26. “What is said about the Spirit before [‘intercedes on our behalf with indescribable sighs’] merely serves to prepare the way for [these words] and to make them intelligible.”²⁸ So even though we could translate more literally, “Likewise the Spirit, too, assists us in our weakness,” something that shows Paul’s buildup would be clearer: “The Spirit also does likewise in assisting with our weakness.” Or even reaching ahead for that thought and dragging it forward to make “likewise” clear: “The Spirit also sighs in assisting with our weakness.”

Before Paul explicitly tells us in the Greek that the Spirit sighs, he tells us why. He sighs to assist with our weakness, and our weakness is that, literally, “we do not know the what we should pray as is necessary *or* fitting.” Some expositors, including the more ancient ones, understand this as a twofold weakness in our prayer life—not knowing “the right content (τί)” or “the right form (καθὸ δεῖ)” for [our] prayer.”²⁹ But just as “I know you, who you are (οἶδά σε τίς εἶ)” (Luke 4:34) is a single concept in Greek—“I know who you are”—so also “we do not know what we should pray as is necessary *or* fitting” is a single concept: “We do not know how to pray (*or* say our prayers) in a fitting way.” Paul makes this even clearer by putting a single definite article *τό* in front of the entire clause, to mark the whole clause as the direct object of *οἶδαμεν*.

As for what Paul means by this concept, Stoeckhardt keenly observes:

In any case, however, most exegetes make the mistake of thinking that Paul is speaking about prayer in general, about the weakness of our prayer and about how the Spirit helps us pray, and they thereby completely abandon the apostle’s line of thought. In this context, a specific asking and praying, a very specific subject of prayer, is under discussion... We sigh and yearn for the consummation of our adoption, for our body’s redemption, and we pray and plead for it. Our sighs ascend to God from the depths of our heart. So we certainly know something about the *τί*, the content of our praying. We have the promise of future glory. But we still have no adequate concept, no appropriate conception, of the glory that shall be revealed in us. Our capacity for comprehension is so weak and the promised glory so exceedingly great and weighty, that we cannot truly grasp it at all. Moreover, the sorrow and misery of this age still weigh us down so much

²⁸ Stoeckhardt, 13.

²⁹ Philippi, 369; see also Stoeckhardt, 14.

and often so completely overwhelm us, that our glimpse into our bright and happy eternity is clouded.

I will interject here and add that, in our day and age, our glimpse into our bright and happy eternity is not only clouded by our sorrows and struggles, but in many cases also by the comforts, joys, and pleasures God graciously gives us. Can our future glory really be greater than video games? than interacting on social media? than our favorite medium of entertainment? than the comforts of our home? than an ocean cruise or other vacation retreat? than sharing beers, food, and laughs with fellow pastors at conference, while staying in a hotel where others clean our rooms, make our beds, and prepare our breakfasts, and all our traveling and lodging expenses are reimbursed by our respective congregations? Stoekhardt continues:

Thus it happens that our praying in no way matches the subject of our prayer, the great blessing for which we are waiting. Sure, we sigh and pray and plead: “Your kingdom come! Deliver us from evil! Lord, just bring me safely to heaven!” But this begging and pleading is still so weak, often so feeble and lame, as if the salvation for which we are asking were a completely trivial matter.³⁰

But—the Holy Spirit to the rescue! “The Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with indescribable sighs.” I have translated *αὐτό* as “himself,” even though it is neuter, because *αὐτό* is used only because it needs to agree with *πνεῦμα*, which is a neuter noun in Greek, and Paul clearly ascribes personal attributes to the Spirit here. The Spirit intercedes on behalf of others. The Spirit has a *φρόνημα*, a mind or mindset.

Augustine and other expositors interpret this sighing as the Spirit making *us* to sigh.³¹ But Paul has already clearly distinguished the sighing taking place in this sub-section from that done by believers in the previous sub-section with *ᾠσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα*, and the Spirit is clearly “presented here not as the originator of our sighs, but rather as...a person who is doing the sighing himself.”³²

However, Paul does make it clear that the Spirit does this sighing from within us. That is already clear from the verb describing how he assists with the weakness of our prayers, *συναντιλαμβάνεται*. He is here with us as he assists; he is lending us a divine hand. That the Spirit’s sighs arise to God from within us is also evident from the name Paul gives to the God who hears the Spirit’s sighs, “the One who searches hearts.” Nevertheless, these are clearly the Spirit’s sighs, not ours, “indescribable sighs” that we could never articulate or put into words this side of heaven.

³⁰ Stoekhardt, 14–15.

³¹ *Patrologia Latina* 35:1425, 2076; Philippi, 370–71.

³² Stoekhardt, 15.

So what are these sighs? Stoeckhardt describes this experience at some length, saying that, when we are in dire need and our prayers aren't really flowing,

we then may detect in our heart an indefinable, inexpressible moan, sighing, and yearning, that penetrates bone and marrow, perhaps even affects the organs of the body. It is a powerful sighing and yearning that soon extricates us from our misery and gives us a taste of powers of the world to come. It's as though someone else, someone stronger, were taking hold of our faltering heart and setting it upright, directing it up toward God, stretching toward God with it, so that now we can once again look up to God and pray more joyfully and confidently.

He even says that “there are no believing Christians who have not experienced this assistance of the Spirit to some extent, who have not had any taste of this comfort of the Spirit.”³³ The problem is that this description of the experience of the Spirit's sighing assistance originates with Stoeckhardt, not with Paul, Peter, John, or Christ. Some of you may be able to relate to Stoeckhardt's description, but he is on much firmer ground when he says later: “But even if we do not feel and experience much of such things, we still know from the apostle's mouth and should believe that the Spirit of God himself dwells and works in us, speaks, sighs, and prays, and with his sighing and praying intercedes for us and will continue to intercede for us, will assist us, lift us up, and carry us all the way until our final sigh.”³⁴ What a comfort to know that when I don't pray, “thy kingdom come,” “deliver us from evil,” “for he is good, and his mercy endures forever,” or “then all your goodness we shall praise, both here and there, in endless days,”³⁵ with sufficient *gravitas* or yearning, the Holy Spirit is making sure that my prayers are reaching God's ears as they ought to. The fact that he does this motivates me all the more to pray more earnestly so that my sighs match his more and more. But even better, this fact also stresses once again just how indescribably great a glory awaits me in heaven, if even my most earnest prayers for that glory require the Spirit's bolstering assistance with indescribable sighs.

And we do know that the Spirit's sighs are reaching God's ears as they ought to. After all, though his sighs are indescribable to us, “the One who searches hearts knows the mind(set) of the Spirit.” The precise understanding of *ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἀγίων* is an interpretational crux. Does the Searcher of hearts know the mind of the Spirit, namely *that* he is interceding on behalf of saints in a God-conforming way? That would seem strangely spoken. It would seem to have made more sense for Paul to say, “...*what* he is pleading on behalf of saints in a God-conforming way.” Does the Searcher of hearts know the mind of the Spirit *because* he intercedes on behalf of saints in a God-

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

³⁵ From a table prayer stanza composed in the seventeenth century that my wife and I regularly use.

conforming way? Stoeckhardt argues against that causal interpretation, because the Searcher of hearts already knows everything going on in human hearts, whether God-pleasing or not.³⁶ The Spirit's intercession wouldn't suddenly cause God to become more cognizant of what is arising from a particular human heart. If I could justify it linguistically, I would like to translate: "The One who searches hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he intercedes on behalf of saints *as God*." Of course, since the Spirit of God is God, the indescribable sighs formed in the mind of the Spirit are perfectly intelligible to God the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 2:11). Unfortunately, the usage of *κατά* simply does not support that interpretation.

Thankfully, what *is* clear is more than enough. What is clear is that *κατά θεόν* corresponds to *καθὸ θεῖ*. We don't know how to pray in a fitting way, but the Spirit does. His intercession conforms to God and his glory (cf. *κατά θεόν* in 1 Pet. 4:6). What is clear is that, even though we do not know what exactly the Spirit is sighing, the Searcher of hearts does know. "And it is self-evident that such God-conforming praying [by the Spirit] is pleasing to God and favorably heard by him."³⁷ What is clear is that, even as the Spirit assists with our weakness with his intercessory, indescribable sighs, he does so considering us still to be what he made us in our baptism by virtue of the blood of Christ—"saints." What is clear is that, even if we cannot put it into words, our future glory is indeed exceedingly great, far greater than the sufferings of the present period.

Grant that your Spirit prompt my praises;
 then shall my singing surely please your ear.
 Sweet are the sounds my heart then raises;
 my prayer in truth and spirit you will hear.
 Then shall your Spirit lift my heart in love
 to sing these psalms to you, my God above.

For he can plead for me with sighings
 that are not speakable by lips defiled.
 He bids me pray with earnest cryings,
 bears witness that I am your precious child,
 joint heir with Christ, and thus may dare to say:
 O heav'nly Father, hear me when I pray! (*Christian Worship* [1993] 189:3–4)

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:26–27

ὡσαύτως -----adv.; *in the same way, similarly, likewise*

³⁶ Stoeckhardt, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

- συναντιλαμβάνεται---pres., mid./deponent, ind., third, sing.; compound verb from σύν (with) and ἀντί (on behalf of, for [the advantage of]) and λαμβάνω (take hold of, grasp, take in hand); “συναντιλαμβάνεσθαι τινι means ‘to lend a hand to someone whom one wishes to help with a task’”;³⁸ main verb; with a thing (dat.), assist with, help with
- ἀσθενεία -----dat., fem., sing.; dat. with συναντιλαμβάνομαι; weakness, infirmity
- προσευξώμεθα-----first aor., mid./deponent, subj.; compound verb from πρόσ (to) and εὔχομαι (wish, pray); deliberative subjunctive in an indir. quest.; pray
- καθό-----comparative conj.; (just) as
- δεῖ-----pres., act., ind., third, sing.; main verb in καθό clause; impers.; (it) is necessary, fitting, proper; (one) must, should, ought
- ὑπερεντυγχάνει -----pres., act., ind., third, sing.; compound verb from ὑπέρ (on behalf of) and ἐν (with) and τυγχάνω (meet); main verb; plead, intercede on (someone’s) behalf; Luther takes the ὑπέρ component in the sense of super and renders, mächtiglich vertreten, but the context, the end of vs. 27, and the usage argue against this
- στεναγμοῖς-----dat., masc., pl.; dat. of means; sigh
- ἀλαλήτοις-----dat., masc., pl., adj.; attr. adj.; inexpressible, indescribable; I have rendered indescribable to make clear that the Spirit’s sighs are unable to be expressed by us, as opposed to the Spirit himself not actually expressing anything intelligible to God (which is contradicted by vs. 27)
- ἐραυνῶν-----pres., act., ptc., nom., masc., sing.; attr. subst.; subject; search, examine
- φρόνημα -----acc., neut., sing.; dir. obj.; while -μος and -σις often denote an action or activity (thus φρόνησις, [way of] thinking), -μα often denotes the result of an action or activity;³⁹ mind, what is on (someone’s) mind, mindset
- κατά-----prep. with acc.; marker of norm of similarity or homogeneity, in accordance with, in conformity with
- ἐντυγχάνει-----pres., act., ind., third, sing.; main verb in ὅτι clause; appeal, intercede

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹ Metzger, 42–43.

THE CERTAINTY OF OUR FUTURE GLORY (8:28–30)

Assertion (8:28)

Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν.

And we know about those who love God that all things assist them in securing what is good, since they are called according to plan.

Paul has asserted and established the *greatness* of the future glory of Christians. He now shifts his focus to the *certainty* of this coming glory, but with the same purpose of motivating us to take up our cross and share in Christ's sufferings willingly, and of comforting and strengthening us as we do so.

Let's start with the elephant in the Lutheran room: Why does Paul call Christians "those who love God," and not "the faithful," "those who trust in God," "those who believe in Christ," or something along those lines, since we are saved through faith alone? The answer is that a good tree produces good fruit (Matt. 7:17). Love, especially love for God, is the chief fruit of faith (Gal. 5:6, 22). All Christians love God, and Christians are in fact the only people who love God. First, they are the only people who truly know who God is. Second, even if we consider the attitude of adherents of other religions toward their false gods, we can describe their attitude as fear, even respect and awe, but not love. They might claim to love their god, but if they do, their concept of love is warped and perverted, precisely because they worship a false god. You cannot truly know love if you do not know the One who is love itself (1 John 4:8, 16). Non-Christians, like Luther before his tower discovery, cannot love a god whom they can never please, with whom they can never know for certain how they stand, on whom they can never completely rely, and who gives them no confidence in the face of death. That is not the true God. That is not our God. "Like 'saints' [in verse 27], ['those who love God'] is another common designation for believing Christians (Eph. 6:24). It is for those who love God that he has prepared salvation, has promised eternal life, the eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 2:9; James 1:12; 2:5)."⁴⁰ If this violates your Lutheran sensibilities, adjust your Lutheranism.

Plutarch, in his moral writings, has a similar Greek construction to Paul's here. He says that, just as poetry makes unwholesome content more insidious, but makes beneficial and instructive content more interesting, so nature (ἡ φύσις), in endowing a woman with a beautiful appearance, persuasive voice, and attractive figure, assists a

⁴⁰ Stoeckhardt, 19.

loose woman in obtaining pleasure and succeeding in deceit (τῇ μὲν ἀκολάστῳ πρὸς ἡδονὴν καὶ ἀπάτην...συνήργησεν), but assists a chaste woman in securing much goodwill and strong affection from her husband (τῇ δὲ σώφρονι πρὸς εὐνοϊαν ἀνδρὸς καὶ φιλίαν μεγάλην συνήργησεν).⁴¹ Here Paul uses εἰς instead of Plutarch's πρὸς, but εἰς and πρὸς are often interchangeable and the idea is the same. All things assist those who love God in obtaining or securing what is good.

Even if Paul is not using συνεργέω in its literal sense of “working together,” that concept is still present in the background here, since “all things” are the subject and are assisting believers in securing the same thing. We can therefore imagine “all things” as workers on the same assembly line, all doing their part to help Christians secure what is good, even though these metaphorical workers represent the most diverse things, yes, all things, ranging from beautiful weather to catastrophic weather, giving gifts at Christmas to armed bank robbery, wedding vows to violent physical abuse, the obtaining of a good job to a stock market crash, the healthy birth of a newborn to a tragic death by accident or suicide.

What Paul means to say, of course, is that God is in control of all things and that God is working them for good. But he rhetorically phrases it in such a way that we must imagine all of those things as if they had a mind of their own and were voluntarily joining everything else in helping us to secure what is good.

Let's talk about a couple ways this passage is abused. First, it's abused when we misunderstand ἀγαθόν because we forget the context. If you're following Paul closely, you would immediately guess that the good he has in view is the ultimate good—our future glory. He is, in fact, in the middle of assuring us of this. This guess is confirmed by Paul's own explanation in verses 29–30, where he equates ἀγαθόν with being conformed to the image of his Son in heaven (vs. 29) and being glorified (vs. 30). In other words, Paul is *not* talking fortunate coincidences, for instance, about Christians who didn't go in to work at the Twin Towers or didn't end up boarding the hijacked planes on September 11 for one reason or another. That is certainly an evidence of God's providential care, but it is not an evidence of all things assisting Christians in securing what is good that Paul is talking about here. Paul does not have in mind here our physical safety, health, or wealth, but our spiritual welfare culminating in eternal glory. All things work together for *that* good.

Dr. Mark Paustian and John Wildauer discussed the second abuse of this passage on Episode 12 of their podcast, *Where Two or Three: Christian Conversation at the Table of Communication Scholarship*. Talking about empathy, Dr. Paustian presented a case study that he said would “almost sound wrong when you first hear it, or could bother a person a little bit.” He continued:

⁴¹ *Moralia* 769c–d, in Bernardakis, ed., 456. (I owe this reference to Danker, ed., 969.1, under συνεργέω.)

I've heard this story often from students, where they have lost someone—like they lost a sister or lost a brother or whatever, [or] lost a parent—and then a minister comes to serve them and he, let's say, quotes Romans, Chapter 8. He says, "Well, we know all things work for the good of those who love God." And then the person [i.e. the minister] leaves. And then the story here in the class would be like, "It took us years to get over that. It took us years to get over what that called worker, pastor, minister did to us." And then what's troubling is: How could that be wrong? How could bringing the word of God to someone backfire so badly? But I hear that story over and over—not endlessly, but it's been repeated.

Earlier, Dr. Paustian had talked about Job's friends as an excellent example of empathy. They had done a lot of things wrong, but everything they did before they started talking was right. They had "sat on the ground with [Job] for seven days and seven nights [without saying] a word to him" (Job 2:13). They shared in his suffering. Dr. Paustian alluded back to that when explaining the negative effect of these pastoral visits. The problem was not what the pastors had shared. The problem was that they had basically shared that passage as an excuse to say a prayer and leave, rather than doing the difficult work of listening and empathizing and sharing the burden of loss as much as possible, even if that might also have entailed some difficult conversation. As a result, instead of reinforcing the truth that all things work together for the good of Christians, their cold visit itself became one of the "all things" that they now had to try to believe God was also somehow working for their eternal good, in addition to their loss.

Paul now adds an appositional phrase to "those who love God," namely *τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὓσιν*, "for those who are called according to plan *or* according to design." An appositional phrase like this certainly acts as a clarification, a more precise definition. But often a phrase like this also has causal force. (Imagine hearing an ad on the radio: "Runnings is having an appreciation sale for all our customers, all those who have supported our business over the years." The appositional phrase not only further defines "customers," but also provide the reason for the sale.) Paul's participle *οὓσιν* especially causes us to lean this direction, since it is technically superfluous. If he simply wanted an appositive, *τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς*, without *οὓσιν*, would have served just fine. But a participle, especially a participial form of "to be," can give a circumstantial character to the description—"being [as they are] those called according to plan." And again, Paul's explanation in the following verses also supports this understanding.

We must note that Paul and the apostles use *καλέω* and its cognates, like *κλητοί*, differently than Jesus does in the parable of the wedding banquet (Matt. 22:1–14). Jesus uses *κλητοί* in the sense of *invitati*, "invited," to describe all those who hear the call of the gospel, even those who refuse and reject it. The apostles in their letters use it in the sense of *arcessiti*, "called in," to describe all those who have actually followed the gospel call of God. However, while *κλητοί* as used by the apostles always implies the presence of faith, the emphasis in *κλητοί* is not on our acceptance, but on God's call in the gospel.

Paul is pointing us outside of ourselves for the certainty that all things are assisting us in securing heavenly glory. He is pointing us to the external call of the gospel—whether in Word or in sacraments. As Luther said in his Genesis lectures when personifying faith, “God is my God, because he speaks to me.”⁴²

Christians, those who love God, have been and continue to be called to be such by the gospel, the gospel that doesn’t just give us peace in the present and help us to make sense of and endure the present, but also promises participation in Christ’s eternal glory in the future, which Paul will underscore as he continues. That call in itself already guarantees that all things are assisting us in securing heavenly glory. But this guarantee is strengthened by the fact that this calling took and takes place in accordance with a plan, a plan that predated us (*πρό-θεσιν*), a divine plan, as Paul will soon show.

[God’s] calling is a historical event; it occurs in time. The divine plan, which is realized in his calling, lies outside of time. It is an act taking place within God before time, a plan that God conceived by himself, in his eternal counsel, a *πρόθεσις, ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ* [i.e. ἐν Χριστῷ] (Eph. 1:9), a *πρόθεσις τῶν αἰώνων* (Eph. 3:11). This eternal plan is essentially identical to eternal election. Thus what Weiss states about God’s election and its relationship to his calling is also true of this plan: “Election and calling are...inseparable, correlative concepts; where the first takes place, so does the second. It’s just that no one can perceive the former, since it is an act taking place before time within God, while the latter makes an appearance as a historical fact.”⁴³

Out of filial duty to and love for my circuit father, Pastor Windsperger, whose loathing of the Reformed is the stuff of legend, I will also include this quote from Stoeckhardt:

It should also be pointed out that strict Reformed theologians, following Augustine’s precedent,⁴⁴ contrast those called *κατὰ πρόθεσιν* with those called *μὴ κατὰ πρόθεσιν*. They then connect that idea with the Calvinistic dogma that, when non-elect are called, it is not a powerful calling and is not done in earnest, and that in those cases the calling has no effect because the divine plan is lacking. But such a distinction between two classes of called people—those called by plan and those called sans plan—is foreign to Paul’s teaching, and it has no support in Romans 8:28. ...

What the case is with [others who have heard the same gospel and yet are not converted and saved] can be found on a different page of the Bible. When Scripture speaks of the many who are also called, in the sense of *invitati*, and are lost nevertheless (e.g. in Matt. 20:1–16; 22:1–14; 23:37), it uses neither the expression *κατὰ πρόθεσιν* nor the opposite *μὴ κατὰ πρόθεσιν*. On that subject, Scripture does not occupy itself with the plan

⁴² Weimarer Ausgabe 43:243 (commenting on Genesis 22:16).

⁴³ Stoeckhardt, 21–22, quoting Weiss, “Die Prädestinationslehre,” 79.

⁴⁴ Patrologia Latina 35:2076.

of God at all. There it merely affirms that God has called, invited, those people through the gospel, and has done so earnestly and powerfully; that he has not spared any effort with them, but has done all that he could do to rescue them; and that they for their part hindered the effect of the Word, persistently resisted the Holy Spirit, who wanted to convert them as much as anyone else; that they were not willing and therefore have only themselves to blame for their destruction. We should content ourselves with these scriptural thoughts and not grab something that Scripture says about the called in other places, in a different context—where they are called κλητοί in a special sense, in the pregnant sense of the word—and mix it in here.⁴⁵

We will return to this idea of sticking to the pages of the Bible that actually deal with the topic at hand in a bit.

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:28

δέ-----particle of punctuation and contrast with multiple uses (recall that the original manuscripts did not have periods, commas, etc., so δέ, when not used in conj. with another particle like μέν, marked the beginning of a new thought, with the degree of break from or contrast with the preceding content being determined by the context); here used transitionally (labeled the δὲ μεταβατικόν by some grammarians)

ἀγαπῶσιν-----pres., act., ptc., dat., masc., pl.; attr. subst.; dat. of advantage; *love*. Note: No more should ever be read into ἀγαπάω, by itself, than we read into our own English word *love*. The two are semantically identical. Ἀγαπάω does not have any *intrinsic* connotation of selflessness or of seeking the good of its object. That connotation can only arise from the context. The best proof of this is in 2 Samuel 13 in the Septuagint, where Amnon is described as “loving” his half-sister Tamar (ἠγάπησεν αὐτήν, vs. 1; τὴν ἀγάπην, ἣν ἠγάπησεν αὐτήν, vs. 15). That Amnon’s love was anything but selfless and godly is evident from the content of that chapter. This is precisely why John 3:16, when describing God’s love, starts with οὕτως and is followed by a ὥστε clause. Here in Rom. 8:28, genuine, devoted love is clearly in view, since οἱ ἀγαπῶντες τὸν θεόν is a synonym for ἅγιοι in vs. 27, a fact confirmed by the content of vv. 28–30.

συνεργεῖ-----pres., act., ind., third, sing.; compound verb formed from σύν (*with, together*) and ἔργον (*work*); main verb in obj. clause; *cooperate, work together, assist, serve* (used with both sing. and pl. subjects)

⁴⁵ Stoeckhardt, 22, 23.

ἀγαθόν -----acc., neut., sing., adj., subst.; obj. of εἰς; (*what is*) *good, beneficial, valuable*

πρόθεσιν -----acc., fem., sing.; compound noun from πρό (*before, in both its spatial and temporal sense*) and θέσις (*setting, placing*); obj. of κατά; *plan, design, purpose* (here the temporal sense of πρό predominates)

κλητοῖς-----dat., masc., pl., adj.; pred. adj. with οὓσιν; *called*

οὓσιν -----pres., act., ptc. of εἰμί, dat., masc., pl.; attr. subst.; appositive to ἀγαπῶσιν with causal force; *be*

Basis for the Assertion in 8:28 (8:29–30)

ὅτι οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς· οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὓς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν· οὓς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

For those God pre-selected, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers. And whom he predestined, those he also called, and whom he called, those he also justified, and whom he justified, those he also glorified.

At last we come to the special focus of this paper. With the causal conjunction ὅτι, Paul indicates that he is explaining what he just said by establishing the reason or basis for it. He just mentioned God's πρόθεσις (vs. 28); he now expands on that, calling it God's πρόγνωσις (προέγνω) and προορισμός (προώρισεν). He just mentioned God's κλήσις (κλητοί, vs. 28); he now expands on that (ἐκάλεσεν), connecting it not just to God's past (προώρισεν), so to speak, but also to the believer's future (ἐδόξασεν).

As we survey the format of these verses, even before studying the words in their context, we see that verse 29 is different from verse 30. In verse 30, Paul follows an invariable formula: οὓς...τούτους καί. But that is not the formula at the beginning of verse 29: οὓς...καί. That might seem to be a minor and insignificant difference, but together with the correspondence of both προέγνω and προώρισεν (vs. 29) to πρόθεσις (vs. 28), it is already another hint that προέγνω and προώρισεν are, in fact, describing the very same act of God, just from different angles.

Paul first mentions οὓς προέγνω, literally, "those (whom) God foreknew *or* knew beforehand." However, Paul cannot be talking about God's bare foreknowledge, because God's foreknowledge encompasses everything and everyone, good and bad (Psalm 139:16; Isa. 46:10; John 21:17), and here he is talking about a specific group of people who are eventually called to faith and ultimately glorified. Paul composes this as a standalone clause; he doesn't feel the need to say that God knew anything in particular about this group of people, just that he foreknew the people themselves. This

is clearly a special kind of knowing, which we might have already guessed from the fact that he used *προγινώσκω* instead of *πρόοιδα*.

Unfortunately, there have been a number of gifted and prominent Lutheran and other Protestant theologians who thought they knew Greek better than Paul. They assumed he was mistaken in composing *οὓς προέγνω* as a self-contained thought, and thus supplied the additional thought, “those he knew *or* saw beforehand *would believe*.” Voilà! Election *intuitu fidei*, in view of faith.⁴⁶ But, as Stoeckhardt notes, this addition is “completely arbitrary.”

That’s the same legitimacy, or rather illegitimacy, the Romanists have when they amend *fide justificamur* by adding *caritate formata* (“we are justified by faith, namely faith formed by love”). You cannot make that amendment without amending and inventing additions to the main point. This traditional interpretation belongs in the category of linguistic impossibilities and opens the doors and the gates to every form of arbitrariness in exegesis.⁴⁷

In addition to its ordinary meanings and being used to describe a decree, decision, or resolution,⁴⁸ *γινώσκω* and *γινῶ* can also have the pregnant meaning, “to give attention to someone, to form a connection with someone, or to be in such a connection.”⁴⁹ For instance, in Galatians 4:9, Paul refers to the Christian’s conversion as “being known by God.” God’s knowing of Christians also seems to refer to their conversion in 2 Timothy 2:19. God tells Israel through Amos, “You alone have I known out of all the clans of the earth” (3:2). This is clearly more of an *acknowledgment* than a *knowledge*. “It is dynamic [acknowledgment], embracing the person in his own inmost being, an embracing and permeating with divine love...and is essentially equivalent to electing.”⁵⁰ In 1 Peter 1:20, Christ is described as someone *προεγνωσμένος* before the foundation of the world, but now revealed in these last times for the sake of Peter’s audience. In the context, the meaning cannot be that God had merely known about Christ and his redeeming work in advance. When the one who knows from eternity and the one who then reveals in time is the same, then the knowing has to be more than just knowing. The only natural meaning is that God the Father had formed a specific connection with Christ in advance, that Christ had been acknowledged, selected, and

⁴⁶ E.g. Gerhard, 200, 321, 326–27, 331–32; Calov, *Systematis Locorum Theologicorum... Tomus Decimus*, 642, 653; Philippi, 377; Godet, *Commentaire*, 213.

⁴⁷ Stoeckhardt, 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27–29.

⁵⁰ Keil, *Biblischer Commentar über die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, 185.

appointed in advance, from eternity, to be the unblemished lamb who would redeem humanity by his blood.

Stoeckhardt concludes:

Corresponding to this usage, οὐς προέγνω in our present passage conveys that God, in his eternal plan and decree, focused on us, “considered [us] in grace,”⁵¹ fixated on us, as it were, “fix[ed] the mind upon” us,⁵² confiscated us for himself, awarded us to himself, and thus made us his own already in advance. Obviously this acknowledging by God beforehand is not an effective acknowledgment in the same sense as the acknowledgment by which we are converted. It is not yet an acknowledging that affects, takes hold of, and permeates its object. For this acknowledging beforehand is plainly an eternal act of God, a resolution and decree of God taking place before time. The persons whom God acknowledged beforehand were not yet living when God acknowledged them beforehand. At the time, we only existed in the eyes and decree of God, and in that eternal counsel God appropriated, awarded, and ordained us for himself in such a way that we would then become his own *de facto* in time, in the way already described [namely, through the external means of grace]. Perhaps the most suitable German translation of οὐς προέγνω would be: *welche er zuvor sich ersehen hat* (“those he picked out for himself in advance or pre-selected for himself”). Πρόγνωσις has that same meaning in 1 Peter 1:1–2, where κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρός more precisely defines the concept ἐκλεκτοῖς. The meaning there is this: You are elect people as a result of the fact that God the Father already selected you for himself in advance, from eternity.⁵³

So God’s pre-selecting of his own—his identifying them, writing down their names, so to speak, and forming a bond with them in his heart—is one aspect of his eternal plan, one aspect of election. But Paul continues: “For those God pre-selected, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers.” Now Paul is explaining what he meant by all things assisting Christians in securing *what is good*. When God made his plan “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), he didn’t just write down our names and make plans to establish a bond with us in time. He also determined a goal for us; he destined us “to be conformed to the image of his Son (συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ).” Here the focus, as evident both from the larger context and from the next verse, is on our being conformed to his Son’s appearance in glory. “We suffer with him, that we also may be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). “Just as we have borne the image of the man made from dust, we will also bear the image (τὴν εἰκόνα) of the heavenly man” (1 Cor. 15:49). Jesus Christ “will transform our lowly body to be conformed (σύμμορφον) to the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:21). Thus “both expressions, προέγνω and προώρισε, describe

⁵¹ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article 11, par. 23.

⁵² Hodge, 447.

⁵³ Stoeckhardt, 28–29.

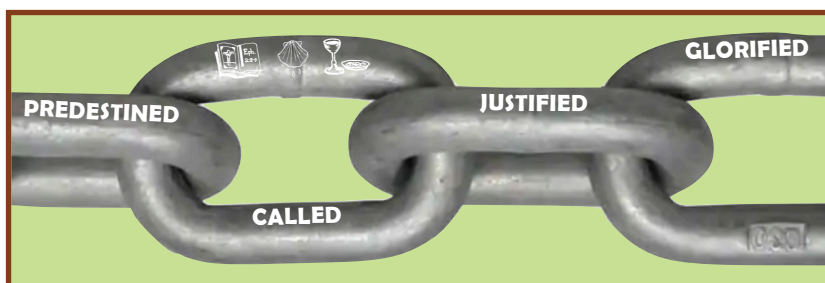
one and the same eternal counsel of God...but from different angles. The former contains the relationship to God, the latter the relationship to the goal.”⁵⁴ This goal is the “good” our life is squarely aimed at.

Paul’s attached purpose clause, “so that [his Son] would be the firstborn among many brothers,” is simply paraphrasing our future state of glory. “Firstborn” here is a title of status and rank. Logically speaking, the glory Christ has won comes first, since no Christian has any glory apart from him and his glory. All of us Christians, even those who lived and died prior to Christ’s incarnation, follow in his train. “That is the substance and orientation of divine predestination: a great host of blessed, dazzling, glorified humans, gathered around the dazzling, glorified Son of Man, the God-man.”⁵⁵

Paul has laid the groundwork for the certainty of our future glory. God has selected us and destined us for glory from eternity. Human plans fall through, but God’s plans never fail. But how does he carry out this plan? And how can we know that we are a part of it?

“And whom he predestined, those he also called, and whom he called, those he also justified, and whom he justified, those he also glorified.” Brothers, stamp and etch the image of these four

inseparable and unbreakable chain links in your hearts and minds. Those whom God predestines (link #1), he also calls to faith in time by the gospel (link #2). When he calls people to faith in Christ, he also justifies them



through that faith (link #3), so that they are holy, innocent of all sin. And if they are without sin, he must also glorify them in heaven (link #4). “The apostle chose the proleptic aorist [ἐδόξασεν, ‘glorified’], so as to the place the glorification on the same level of dependability as προέγνω, προώρισε, ἐκάλεσε, and ἐδικαίωσε, to mark it as something already given in and with those other actions.”⁵⁶

If you can insert yourself into just one of these chain links, then you can and should immediately have the confidence that you are in all the others too. And Paul already told us in verse 28 into which of these four chain links we can insert ourselves. To paraphrase: “We know about those who love God that all things assist them in securing the ultimate good, since they are *called* according to God’s eternal plan.” God’s call has come to us, and continues to come to us, in the gospel of Jesus in Word and sacrament. If the water joined with his word has hit your head in baptism, if his gospel

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁶ Weiss, ed., 380.

promises have reached your ears, if his Son's body and blood have touched your lips, then you have been called, brothers. God is your God, because he speaks to you. So then, you, *you*, have also been in God's heart and plans from eternity, you, *you*, are also justified and innocent of all sin, and you, *you*, will certainly also share in the heavenly glory of Christ your Savior.

"But...but...but what if I don't really believe it? What if my people don't believe it?" What, does this sound too unconditional for you, brothers? Are you afraid that the sheep in your congregations will turn this truth into a license to sin if you proclaim this too purely and freely? (Isn't that the same complaint Roman Catholics have always had about Lutheranism?)

It's time to revisit the distinction between law and gospel. How many of you have attended a Bible study, or heard a sermon on Good Shepherd Sunday, on Jesus's words, "No one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28), and heard the pastor say, "But you can still jump out of his hand"? Ugh. Is Jesus lying in John 10? If you jump out of his hand, hasn't the devil snatched you out of Jesus's hand? Can you be outside of Jesus's hand and *not* be in the devil's hand? Is there a neutral ground?

Similarly, I've heard Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, where John sees angels and saints praising God for bringing people into his kingdom from every language, used as a club to lay a guilt trip on Christians for not more aggressively supporting mission work and the translation of the Bible into other languages. (There are an estimated 165 million people for whom not a single verse of Scripture has been translated into the language used in their homes.) They even implied that this failure on our part was delaying Judgment Day. Ugh. Aren't those passages proclamations of gospel? Aren't they celebrations, not incriminations?

When Jesus and his apostles are proclaiming gospel, preach the gospel. Don't be Moses at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin, begrudgingly striking the rock to bring forth water for the rebels, when God wants you to represent him as nothing but gracious and generous to his dear and chosen people. That clearly displeased the Lord (Num. 20:12; 27:12–14). The law in John 10 is not your flesh's ability to forsake Christ. As Stoeckhardt would say, that warning is on a different page of the Bible. When you are preaching on verses that have that warning (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:12; Luke 8:13), then preach that warning, and do so in all seriousness. The law in John 10 is the number of our enemies and their ferocity and burning desire to snatch us out of Christ's pen and out of Christ's hand. And the gospel in John 10 answers that, and answers it definitively. Similarly, Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 are meant to make us marvel that, on Judgment Day (which could indeed come at any time, regardless of our human statistics on Bible translation), God will have succeeded in bringing so many people, and such a broad array of people, into his kingdom in spite of his church's manifold enemies, weaknesses, hindrances, and struggles.

So too, election is a gospel doctrine. The law in these verses of Roman 8 is the weakness of our flesh manifested in doubts and uncertainties about our status as God's children and our glorious goal and in inadequate prayers, and the way those doubts, uncertainties, and inadequate prayers make us poor and miserable cross-bearers. The gospel in these verses of Romans 8 answers that, and answers it definitively. So when you preach election, do the same. Total depravity isn't the only teaching in Calvinist TULIP theology with which we can agree. We can also agree with perseverance of the saints, when it is presented as a gospel doctrine in connection with election for the comfort of believers, and not as the Calvinists present it—as an umbrella doctrine for any and every situation that negates or blunts the passages of the Bible that warn against falling away.⁵⁷

Doctrines don't just have content. They also have a particular place, context, and application. That's why, for example, we are completely silent about the law when confronted with repentant, grief-stricken sinners. Even though the law is still true, it has no place on that field. Same with election with regard to the student's question I mentioned at the beginning. By pointing to election and saying, "So God does show favoritism?", he was essentially using a gospel truth to try to answer a law question, namely, "Why are some condemned?" Election is a doctrine meant to comfort Christians, especially those Christians feeling the weight of the cross Christ has called them to take up daily. If you're not in an arena where comfort is needed or desired by Christians, then election's ticket isn't valid for admission. Keep it out.

It is true enough that the elect are only those who persist in faith to the end and are ultimately glorified. But Scripture consistently regards and describes believing Christians as persons whose enduring characteristic is faith and who also reach faith's goal, the salvation of souls. ... To be sure, experience teaches that many who come to faith sooner or later fall away again. And Scripture earnestly warns against falling away and even speaks of temporary believers. But what our position should be on temporary believers is found on a different page of the Bible. That is a separate truth, one that we should not mix in with the scriptural statements about the election of the children of God to eternal life, since those statements only deal with those persons who believe and are saved.⁵⁸

True, you may not see some of those to whom you preach and teach election in heaven someday. But let it not be because you did not feed them with that rich and glorious doctrine in all of its unconditional splendor when you were called upon to do so.

⁵⁷ Even though I have not heard this asserted much in our circles, I am not the first person to do so. I distinctly remember the sainted Prof. Daniel Deutschlander making this same assertion in one of his classes. And even if no Lutheran had ever asserted it before, the fact is that Paul is clearly teaching a perseverance of the saints here with his four inseparable chain links.

⁵⁸ Stoeckhardt, 32.

I feel like I myself might be approaching a point where I am not letting the gospel of these glorious verses predominate. So enough of that. God has called you by the gospel, brothers, and so you are numbered with the elect, numbered with the saints, and numbered with those who will be glorified. I know you are loving and basking in that comfort right now. Don't deprive your people of that same glorious soul food when God's word serves it up.

Let's return to the high school junior's question and digress for a moment. Even though the safest, most biblically sound ground is to say, "You're dragging election into the wrong arena. Let's take it back where it belongs," perhaps there is a way we can address an intellectual objection like his without finding ourselves on the mucky edges of some heretical swamp.

In every other case, what does favoritism entail? There is something in the object of the favoritism that makes that person a favorite—polite manners; a cute smile; good looks; similar interests, upbringing, culture; etc. If electing those who will be in heaven is favoritism, that prompts the question, "What made them God's favorites?" The answer is that there is *no* uniting factor or characteristic in the elect, except their sin and its manifestations which, if anything, should have prevented God from electing them. We *are* God's favorites in the etymological sense—that is, recipients of God's favor. But ironically, that word is *never* used that way in English. The "favor" is always earned in favoritism, but we have not earned it from God.

It is also helpful to remember that in Greek, "God does not show favoritism" is "There is no face-taking with God (οὐ ἐστὶν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ)." God has made us his favorites, etymologically speaking, but he did not take our faces when doing so. Nothing in us or about us prompted his selection. It was completely undeserved. The rhyme or reason for his choice is hidden in the depths of his own heart, and is nowhere to be found in us. And none of this negates his universal, saving will, because to find out what his will is for all people, we go to passages that talk about that. Which brings us back to keeping election in its proper arena.

Finally, to turn my attention back to my circuit father, let us give the Reformed doctrine of election a good thrashing before we leave these verses.

First and foremost, we should note that the apostle does not talk about the eternal decree of God commonly called the election of grace (*Gnadenwahl*) until after he has first expounded the chief articles of Christian doctrine, the articles of sin and of grace, of justification and sanctification. Not until here, where he is directing the focus of converted, justified, sanctified children of God to their future inheritance, does he point to this counsel of God regarding their salvation. It is therefore unscriptural to turn predestination, like Calvin does, into a foundational principle from which to derive all Christian doctrine. ...

Furthermore, the apostle knows only of predestination to eternal life. He does not say one syllable about a predestination to damnation. The latter is a fiction of the

Calvinists, which gives their entire doctrine a bitter by-flavor.⁵⁹ It is an illegitimate conclusion, a logical fallacy, when a person makes an inference from the προορισμός of which Paul is speaking about the fate of those who are lost, about the cause of damnation. The biblical text does not offer any support for that.⁶⁰

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:29–30

- προέγνω-----second aor., act., ind., third, sing.; main verb in relative clause;
choose, select beforehand, in advance, pre-select
- προώρισεν-----first aor., act., ind., third, sing. of προορίζω; main verb; *predestine*
- συμμόρφους -----acc., masc., pl., adj., subst.; second, pred. acc. with προορίζω;⁶¹ *similar (to) in form, conformed (to) (that to which one is conformed put in the gen.)*
- εικόνας -----gen., fem., sing.; gen. with σύμμορφος; *form, appearance*
- εἰς-----prep. with acc.; used with subst. inf. to mark purpose or result;⁶² *in order that, so that*
- εἶναι -----pres., act., inf., subst.; obj. of εἰς; *be*
- αὐτόν-----acc., masc., sing., pron.; subject of inf.;⁶³ *he*
- πρωτότοκον-----acc., masc., sing., adj., subst.; pred. acc.; *firstborn*

TRIUMPHANT DECLARATION OF VICTORY (8:31–39)

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν πρὸς ταῦτα; εἰ ὁ θεὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, τίς καθ' ἡμῶν; ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίζεται; τίς ἐγκαλέσει κατὰ ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ; θεὸς ὁ δικαίων· τίς ὁ κατακρινῶν; Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀποθανών, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐγερθεὶς, ὃς καὶ ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. τίς ἡμᾶς χωρίσει ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Χριστοῦ; θλίψις ἢ στενοχωρία ἢ διωγμὸς ἢ λιμὸς ἢ γυμνότης ἢ κίνδυνος ἢ μάχαιρα; καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι ἔνεκεν σοῦ θανατούμεθα ὄλην τὴν ἡμέραν, ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς. ἀλλ' ἐν τούτοις πᾶσιν ὑπερνικῶμεν διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς. πέπεισμαι γὰρ ὅτι οὔτε θάνατος οὔτε ζωὴ οὔτε ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἀρχαὶ οὔτε

⁵⁹ Dr. Scott Keith and Rev. Brian Thomas, a Lutheran pastor with a background coming out of Presbyterianism, talk about this in “Wittenberg vs. Geneva” (April 15, 2016) on *The Thinking Fellows Podcast*. Dr. Keith points out, and Rev. Thomas agrees, that in Calvinism everything goes through, and is viewed through the lens of, God’s sovereignty.

⁶⁰ Stoeckhardt, 31, 32.

⁶¹ Smyth 1613; Blass and Debrunner 157 (2).

⁶² Blass and Debrunner 402 (2).

⁶³ Smyth 1972, 1975.

ἐνεστῶτα οὔτε μέλλοντα οὔτε δυνάμεις οὔτε ὕψωμα οὔτε βάθος οὔτε τις κτίσις ἕτέρα
δυνήσεται ἡμᾶς χωρίσαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

What then shall we say in response to all this? If God is for us, who is against us? The One who did not even spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him? Who will bring charges against those elected by God? God is the one who justifies! Who is going to be the one to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, or rather, was raised, and he is also at the right hand of God, and he is also pleading for us! Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or destitution or danger or sword? After all, it is written: “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are considered as sheep for slaughter.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither events of today nor of tomorrow, nor powers—neither the world above nor what lies in the deep—nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Stoekhardt says that “the apostle’s discourse ends here in an epilogue that is one of the most magnificent ever to be voiced and published in human speech.” Yet “the powerful rhetoric is simply the proper form for the exalted, divine content.”⁶⁴ Augustine seems to say the same thing in Book 4 of his work *On Christian Doctrine*. There he refers to Cicero’s three styles of speaking—the subdued style (*summisse*) for minor matters, the temperate or steady style (*temperate*) for middling or ordinary matters, and the grand style (*granditer*) for great matters.⁶⁵ While acknowledging that every matter in the Scriptures is great and important, he still finds this classification useful in reading the Scriptures. He goes on to provide some examples of each style in the writings of Paul. After citing examples of the subdued and temperate styles, he continues:

The majestic [*or grand*] style of speech differs from the temperate style just spoken of, chiefly in that it is not so much decked out with verbal ornaments as exalted into vehemence by mental emotion. It uses, indeed, nearly all the ornaments that the other does; but if they do not happen to be at hand, it does not seek for them. For it is borne on by its own vehemence; and the force of the thought, not the desire for ornament, makes it seize upon any beauty of expression that comes in its way. It is enough for its object that warmth of feeling should suggest the fitting words; they need not be selected by careful elaboration of speech. If a brave man be armed with weapons adorned with gold and jewels, he works feats of valor with those arms in the heat of battle, not because they

⁶⁴ Stoekhardt, 42.

⁶⁵ Schaff, ed., 586.1.

are costly, but because they are arms; and yet the same man does great execution, even when anger furnishes him with a weapon that he digs out of the ground.

He then goes on to cite Romans 8:28–39 as one such example of Paul speaking in the grand style, “with both power and beauty.”⁶⁶ In other words, Augustine is saying that Paul doesn’t speak in such an exalted style here because he is carefully and deliberately choosing this or that rhetorical device or figure of speech. He isn’t surveying a chest of weapons looking for one adorned with gold and jewels. He speaks in such an exalted style simply because, by the time he comes to these verses, the sublime divine content that he has just shared has exalted his mental emotion into vehemence. At this point, if he had but a dull and rusty sword that he had just dug out of the ground—woe betide any hostile force that dared to approach him. The glorious, divine truth of the gospel has put him into beast mode. Of course, being inspired by the Holy Spirit doesn’t hurt any. Even Erasmus, who hardly had a clear understanding of Paul’s doctrine, commented on these verses, “When did Cicero ever say anything more sublimely eloquent?”⁶⁷

We need not spend much time on these verses. We need only revel in them. Even if we might not know exactly what Paul is referring to here or there, how could we possibly come away confused after reading just the first few rhetorical questions and the final clause? Our future glory is great and it is certain in Christ. Who or what, then, can really harm us?

We are part of a divine plan—a plan that stretches back into eternity, is clear from our current standing in the faith as a result of God’s call in the gospel of Christ, and will certainly culminate in eternal glory, a glory whose greatness far surpasses the bitterness and pain of our current sufferings. What shall we say in response to that? God must be for us, must be on our side. And if he is for us, who can stand against us? Sure, we will have grievous spiritual and earthly enemies, but “even the most bitter enemies’ plans will be so unsuccessful against those whom God is protecting, that they may be despised and thought of as nothing.”⁶⁸ No one can rob us of our glorious goal.

Every blessing that Paul has described in these verses of Romans 8 is one that comes to us and is ours in Christ. He hasn’t stressed that so much in the preceding verses, but he reminds us of it now: God gave up his own Son for us—not just that, but as the sainted Professor Deutschlander liked to stress, he did not spare him! He did not save him from *any* pain or discomfort—for us and for our salvation! Arguing from the greater to the lesser: If he was willing to do that for us, and did that for us, how can

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 589.1–590.1.

⁶⁷ Erasmus, 390.

⁶⁸ Fritzsche, 208.

there be any doubt that he will give us everything he has promised us, everything that we need for this life and eternal glory in the life to come?

“Who will bring charges against those elected by God?” Certainly Satan will. That’s what his name means—“accuser.” Certainly other enemies of Christianity will. Certainly our own conscience will. But no matter how true their accusations ring—and many *will* ring true—they can’t accuse us in any way that can be considered successful. They are bringing charges against those elected by God, and God is precisely the one who justifies, who acquits of any and all charges, who declares innocent and righteous for Christ’s sake.

“Who is going to condemn?” This may simply be an intensification of the previous rhetorical question, a rounding out of the courtroom picture already painted. Those who accuse us do so out of desire to persuade God to condemn us. Others have suggested that Paul is referring to Christ Jesus, “who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1; cf. Luke 12:4–5). Either way, “Christ Jesus is the one who died, or rather, was raised, and he is also at the right hand of God, and he is also pleading for us!” With his correction, Paul is not denying that Jesus died (being raised implies having died), but is rather stressing the importance of Christ’s resurrection, because it assures us that his death means our justification and because it was the precursor to his ascension to heaven and sitting at the right hand of the Father, where he is pleading for us. How is anyone going to persuade him to condemn us who is in the middle of pleading for us?

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” With this question, Paul shifts to more direct attempts against our person, of a more forceful nature. “The love of Christ” here is Christ’s love for us, not our love for Christ. “For we can only be connected with something outside of us, and so ‘we can [also] only be separated from that which is outside of us.’”⁶⁹ Paul is essentially asking: Who is able to sever the bond we have with Christ through faith, since faith is what connects us to, and makes us benefactors of, Christ’s love? It might seem initially strange that, after asking “Who?”, Paul continues by listing things—“tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or destitution or danger or sword.” But Paul is simply mentioning the forceful means and methods the devil and the world employ in an effort to get us to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). And we *will* experience those means and methods. Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 as proof that the Church has always been a target of hostile and violent and even murderous attacks in every age.

Yet “in all these things we are more than conquerors (*ὑπερνικῶμεν*) through him who loved us.” We don’t just conquer. We super-conquer. We hyper-conquer. Luther translated: *überwinden wir weit*, “we conquer easily, we are far and away the victors.” To borrow a phrase from a horse race call I once heard: We are an hour and a half the best.

⁶⁹ Stoeckhardt, 38, quoting Hofmann, 356.

It's not even a contest—not by or because of our own power, but “through him who loved us,” Jesus Christ.

“But the certainty that sufferings and tribulations cannot separate us from the love of Christ is founded on another certainty, that absolutely nothing belonging to the realm of the created will ever be in a position to separate us from the love of Christ.”⁷⁰ As Paul says: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither events of today nor of tomorrow, nor powers—neither the world above nor what lies in the deep—nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Do “rulers” refer to earthly rulers or powerful angelic orders? And what about “powers”? It clearly befuddled later copyists, who moved it forward in the sentence so that it read: “neither angels nor rulers nor powers.” (The King James Version followed these later manuscripts.) Stoeckhardt, too, questions its authenticity, even though there are no grounds on which to do so. He connects it in thought, as I have, with the phrase that follows, οὔτε ὑψωμα οὔτε βάθος, in other words, “no stroke of adversity from above and no mighty agitation from the deep originating with the powers hostile to God, namely evil spirits.”⁷¹ But how much can the answers to these questions matter, when Paul goes on to say “nor any other created thing”? It doesn't matter if it's in the spiritual realm or the physical realm, if it's above us or beneath us, in the present or the future, stronger than we are, or way stronger than we are—*nothing* can take us away from the faith. Nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

It is true that the same apostle, who wrote the *πέπεισμαι* in verse 38, elsewhere, in a different context, warns Christians against falling away, even in this very epistle to the Romans (e.g. 11:20–22). This warning is intended for those Christians who tend to become proud, secure, and carefree, and is ultimately useful and necessary for all Christians, since they all still have the sinful flesh to contend with. But to suffering, afflicted Christians, who are concerned about their salvation, the apostle dispenses nothing but comfort, and comforts them precisely by assuring them that no tribulation, yes, absolutely nothing in all the world can tear faith and salvation away from them. And this comfort is valid for all Christians, since there are no Christians who are not anxious about their salvation. Both of these go very well together—on the one hand, Christians procuring their salvation with fear and trembling, as if they could lose it at any moment, and keeping their flesh in check, and on the other hand, Christians being certain of their salvation in the Spirit and in faith, and also being certain that they will never fall away from the comfort of the true faith.

This certainty is the opposite of carnal security. ... Faith is sure of its object and its goal. For faith, the possibility that it could ever and forever cease, could ever leave

⁷⁰ Stoeckhardt, 39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

Christ, is inconceivable. Believing Christians have a twofold certainty—that no one can mess with their goal, and also that they for their part cannot miss the goal. They implicitly depend and rely on the infallible word of God, in which their eternal election, which cannot fail, is revealed to them, and in which God has promised them that he will preserve them in the faith unto salvation by his might. ...

[W]hat we read here is not ordinary human speech and oratory, but a “holy hymn” inspired by the Spirit of God, one that lifts up all who pray this hymn with Paul as if to the heights of heaven. It is a song of victory and triumph, with which believing Christians subdue and trample all enemies of their faith and their salvation. With this song, Christians soar up to their God and to their Christ and hold him fast, until the triumph of faith turns into the triumph of eternity, the triumph of glory.⁷²

Lord Jesus, we sigh for this, we long for this, we yearn for this. Bring us safely to this glorious goal, which you have won for us by your blood and which you have promised us here in your word. You cannot lie, and you will not fail us. To you be all the glory, both now and into eternity. Amen.

If he is ours, we fear no powers,
not of earth or sin or death.
He sees and blesses in worst distresses;
he can change them with a breath.
Wherefore the story tell of his glory
with hearts and voices; all heav'n rejoices
in him forever. Alleluia!
We shout for gladness, win over sadness,
love him and praise him and still shall raise him
glad hymns forever. Alleluia! (*Christian Worship* [2021] 513)

Lexical and Grammatical Notes for 8:31–39

- ὑπέρ -----prep. with gen.; marker indicating that someone or something is in the object's interest; *for, on (someone's) side*
- τίς -----nom., masc., sing., interrogative pron.; *who?*
- καθ' -----prep. with gen.; abbrev. of *κατά*; marker indicating that someone or something is opposed to the object's well-being or success; *against*
- ὅς -----nom., masc., sing., relative pron.; *(he) who*. Note: Here the relative clause, the entirety of which serves as the subject of the main clause (“How will the One who did not even spare...not also graciously give...”), is placed before the main clause for emphasis. Doing so

⁷² *Ibid.*, 41, 42.

effectively makes it a causal clause (“Since he [God] did not even spare..., he will certainly also graciously give...”).⁷³

γε	-----	intensifying enclitic particle; <i>indeed, even</i>
ἐφείσατο	-----	first aor., mid./deponent, ind., third, sing. of φείδομαι; main verb in relative clause; <i>form, appearance</i>
παρέδωκεν	-----	first aor., act., ind., third, sing. of παραδίδωμι; main verb in relative clause; <i>hand over, give up</i>
χαρίσεται	-----	fut., mid./deponent, ind., third, sing.; main verb; <i>graciously give, bestow, give (something) as a gift</i>
ἐγκαλέσει	-----	fut., act., ind., third, sing.; main verb; <i>bring charges against, accuse</i>
ἐκλεκτῶν	-----	gen., masc., pl., adj., subst.; compound adj. from ἐκ (<i>out of</i>) and λέγω (<i>pick up, select</i>); obj. of κατά; <i>chosen, elect</i> . Note that, in the context, Paul must be using ἐκλεκτοί to refer back to προέγνω in vs. 29, further verifying our interpretation of that verb given at that verse.
μᾶλλον	-----	adv.; comparative of μάλα; <i>more, rather</i> ; μᾶλλον δέ is equiv. to the Latin <i>imo vero</i> and <i>vel potius, but rather, yea rather, (or) I should say</i>
ἐντυγχάνει	-----	pres., act., ind., third, sing.; compound verb from ἐν (<i>with</i>) and τυγχάνω (<i>meet</i>); main verb of relative clause; <i>plead, intercede</i>
χωρίσει	-----	fut., act., ind., third, sing.; main verb; <i>separate, divide</i>
Χριστοῦ	-----	gen., masc., sing.; subjective gen.; <i>Christ, (the) Messiah</i>
θλιψις	-----	nom., fem., sing.; subject; <i>affliction, tribulation</i>
στενοχωρία	-----	nom., fem., sing.; compound noun from στενός (<i>narrow</i>) and χώρος (<i>space</i>); subject; <i>distress, anxiety</i>
διωγμός	-----	nom., masc., sing., subject; <i>persecution</i>
λιμός	-----	nom., masc., sing.; subject; <i>famine</i>
γυμνότης	-----	nom., fem., sing.; subject; <i>nakedness, destitution</i>
κίνδυνος	-----	nom., masc., sing.; subject; <i>danger</i>
μάχαιρα	-----	nom., fem., sing.; subj.; <i>sword</i> (together with all its metaph. uses)
ἐνεκεν	-----	prep. with gen.; marker of cause or reason, <i>because of, on account of, for the sake of</i>
θανατούμεθα	-----	pres., pass., ind., first, pl.; main verb in direct quotation introduced by ὅτι; <i>kill, put to death</i>
ἐλογίσθημεν	-----	first aor., pass., ind., first, pl.; <i>consider, regard, look upon, nearly treat</i> ; with εἰς or ὡς, <i>as</i>
σφαγῆς	-----	gen., fem., sing.; gen. of direction and purpose; ⁷⁴ <i>slaughter</i>

⁷³ Smyth 2555.

⁷⁴ Blass and Debrunner 166.

- ὑπερνικῶμεν-----pres., act., ind., first, pl.; compound verb from ὑπέρ (*beyond, more than*) and νικάω (*conquer, overcome, prevail*); main verb; *prevail completely, conquer easily*
- πέπεισμαι-----perf., pass., ind., first, sing. of πείθω; main verb; *convince, persuade*; in the perf. pass., *to be convinced, certain*
- ἄρχαι-----nom., fem., pl.; subject in ὅτι clause; *ruler, official*. With the exception of Titus 3:1, Danker asserts that Paul consistently uses this word of “angelic or transcendent powers,” including in Rom. 8:38,⁷⁵ but such a consistent use is by no means beyond question.
- ἐνεστῶτα-----perf., act., ptc. of ἐνίστημι, nom., neut., pl.; attr. subst; subject in ὅτι clause; *be now, happen now*; perf. ptc. ἐνεστῶς used adjectively, and subst. in contrast to μέλλων, (*in the*) *present*
- μέλλοντα-----pres., act., ptc., nom., neut., pl.; attr. subst.; subject in ὅτι clause; *be about to happen, be in the future*; οὔτε ἐνεστῶτα οὔτε μέλλοντα, *neither anything in the present nor in the future, neither events of today nor of tomorrow*
- δυνάμεις-----nom., fem., pl.; subject in ὅτι clause; *power, force*
- ὑψωμα-----nom., neut., sing.; subject in ὅτι clause; *height, the (world) above*
- βάθος-----nom., neut., sing.; subject in ὅτι clause; *depth, the (world) below, of the deep*⁷⁶
- δυνήσεται-----fut., mid./deponent, ind., third, sing.; main verb; *be able, capable*. Paul uses the future tense not in the sense of “once we get to heaven,” but in the assumption that everyone in his audience is currently connected to Christ’s love through faith.

⁷⁵ Danker, ed., 138.2, under ἀρχή 6.

⁷⁶ See Danker, ed., 162.2, under βάθος 1, for his opinion that both ὑψωμα and βάθος are “astral spirits.” More interesting is his observation there that both are astronomical technical terms, and that βάθος denotes “the celestial space below the horizon from which the stars arise.”

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