

“THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION” (ROMANS 8:1): BUT WHY NOT?

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Why is there no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1)? For card-carrying evangelicals the reflexive response is: because Christ died in their place and for their sins.

Justification through the substitutionary atonement of Christ is one of the first precepts drummed into new believers, and Romans 8:1 is often the proof-text employed to establish the point.¹ Yet while the meaning of this verse may seem self-evident, commentators have considerable trouble with it.

The crux of the problem is that 8:1–2 appears to ground escape from condemnation not in the death of Christ as a substitute for sinners, but in the work of the Spirit in transforming sinners: “for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).² At first blush, this seems to suggest that justification depends on sanctification.

Basically one of three approaches is taken to harmonize this passage with traditional Protestant doctrine.³ One interprets 8:2 as a reference to the death of Christ for sinners so that condemnation is averted through justification rather than through sanctification.⁴ The second solution accepts 8:2 as a

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¹ E.g. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958) 514; M. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–85) 953.

² There are three variants for the pronoun in 8:2, but most commentators adopt “you” as the more difficult reading and in view of its wide manuscript support (rather than “me” or “us”). For discussion, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979) 1:376–377; B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (3d ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Society, 1971) 516. Sanday and Headlam favor “me” (W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [ICC; 5th ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980] 191). Barrett appears to lean toward the omission of any pronoun, but sums up the issue admirably: “Fortunately the variation makes no difference whatever to the meaning of the sentence” (C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* [BNTC; rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991] 144 n. 1).

³ Any attempt to categorize interpretations runs the risks of oversimplification and artificial harmonization, so these differentiations should be considered rough approximations. The perplexity created by this passage is evident from the fact that within the three approaches cited below, there are at least seven variations (even though the sample is far from exhaustive).

⁴ Barrett, *Romans* 145; D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans. Exposition of Chapters 7:1–8:4. The Law: Its Functions and Limits* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 269–270; J. MacArthur, Jr., *Security in the Spirit: Study Notes Romans 8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace, 1985) 1. Moo speaks of realm transfer and finds 8:1–2 to provide the solution to the entire complex of problems described in Romans 6–7: nonetheless he remarks, “The condemnation that our sins deserve has been poured out on Christ, our sin-bearer; that is why ‘there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (v. 1)” (D. J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996] 473, 477, 481).

reference to sanctification, but suggests that “condemnation” in 8:1 refers not to a judicial verdict but to “penal servitude.”⁵ The third approach accepts what is probably the most natural reading of the two clauses but reconfigures the relationship between them: the most popular suggestion is that sanctification is the consequence—rather than the grounds—of justification.⁶

Theologically, each of these propositions is flawless: that is what makes them feasible. Justification is grounded in the substitutionary atonement of Christ, not in transformational righteousness (Rom 3:21–26). Sin does lead to servitude (Rom 6:16). Sanctification is the outgrowth and evidence of justification (Rom 6:5–8). But that very theological legitimacy raises the specter of eisegesis: do these solutions arise from the text or do they impose the clarities of dogmatics onto the text?

Both the truth and the centrality of each of these tenets is assumed in what follows. But reading these doctrines into Romans 8:1–2 is an unnecessary and unhelpful expedient. The apparent meaning of this text must be sustained: “no condemnation” (8:1) retains its usual forensic sense; the liberation of 8:2 refers to transformational, rather than alien, righteousness; and, *gar* (“because” [NIV]; 8:2) grounds the former in the latter.⁷ According to 8:1–2, Christians escape condemnation because they have been transformed by the Spirit; that is, because they now live in such a way that condemnation is no longer warranted. All the same, this passage is amenable to historic Protestant theology.

⁵ F. F. Bruce paraphrases,

There is therefore no reason why they should go on in a life of penal servitude, bound to carry out the dictates of the tyrannical law of sin and death. Christ dwells in them by his Spirit, and his Spirit infuses into them a new principle—the law of life—which is stronger than indwelling sin and sets them free from its tyranny.

(*Romans* [TNTC; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985] 149; cf. B. C. Wintle, “Justification in Pauline Thought,” *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* [ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992] 68).

Often where this interpretation is adopted, it is an explicit solution to the perceived theological problem. Thus Murray explains:

In this context . . . the apostle is not dealing with justification and the expiatory aspect of Christ’s work but with sanctification and with what God has done in Christ to deliver us from the power of sin. Hence what is thrust into the foreground in the terms of “no condemnation” is . . . freedom from the enslaving power of sin.

That is, if 8:2 refers to sanctification, then *a priori* 8:1 cannot refer to justification, for the latter is not grounded in the former (J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* [NICNT; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968] 1:274–275).

⁶ Stott describes sanctification as the “fruit” of justification (J. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994] 222). Cranfield couples this interpretation with the first, agreeing with this interpretation of 8:2, while arguing nonetheless that “no condemnation” in 8:1 is based on justification (*Romans*, 1:372, 374).

⁷ The NIV here takes *gar* in a causal sense, “because.” Grammatically this is possible but not necessary: *gar* is broadly explanatory, and only the context can indicate the specific connection between statement and explanation. Theologically a causal sense is decidedly awkward, at least in the strict sense of identifying the cause of salvation. To keep options open, then, the ambiguous translation “for” seems preferable, at least until exegesis of the passage indicates the nature of the connection established between 8:1 and 8:2.

I. THE REFERENT ON “NO CONDEMNATION”

There are several exegetical ambiguities in 8:1, but most are peripheral to present purposes and may be passed over with little comment. Of paramount concern here is the referent of “no condemnation.” Does “condemnation” refer to the eschatological judgment due sin or to the enslavement in sin experienced in this age? Is it averted by the alien righteousness of Christ, or by transformational righteousness in union with Christ? The obvious place to begin the search for answers is with the other occurrences of the term *katakrima* (“condemnation”) and its cognate *katakrinō* (“condemn”).⁸

1. *Sin, Judgment and Atonement.* The verb *katakrinō* first appears in the lengthy discussion of sin and judgment from 1:18–3:20. Specifically, Paul warns those who criticize the sins of others while overlooking their own: “For in what you judge another, you *condemn* yourself, for you who stand in judgment do the same things” (2:1; emphasis added).

The condemnation in view here relates to the eschatological judgment of God: “the day of wrath and the revelation of the just judgment of God” (2:5). God will judge sin without favoritism (2:2–6). Those who have done good will receive eternal life, as well as glory, honor and peace; those who did evil will face death, as well as wrath and anger, affliction and distress (1:32; 2:6–11). This applies equally to all, whether Jew or Gentile (2:12–16).

Yet a problem soon becomes apparent. No one fulfills the requisite condition: no one is righteous (3:9–20). There is only one way for the deserved judgment to be averted: through the redemptive and substitutionary death of Christ as a propitiation for sin, for all who believe (3:21–26).

While some ambiguities remain,⁹ they do not affect the overall thrust of these texts. For present purposes it is enough to note that the condemnation in view is clearly the eschatological judgment of sin, which is escaped only through the alien righteousness of Christ.

2. *Adam and Christ.* Apart from 8:1 the noun *katakrima* appears only twice in the New Testament, both times in the one paragraph, Romans 5:12–21. Here also the meaning is clear: condemnation entails eschatological judgment, specifically, death. This is demonstrated by the parallelism Paul develops in repeatedly describing the effects of Adam’s transgression:

⁸ Our concern is, of course, with the concept of condemnation rather than with the meaning of the word *katakrima*. For this reason, the survey must cover passages which refer to judgment without using the particular term. Nonetheless, the word provides a helpful introduction to the concept, and thus an appropriate place to begin. On the distinction between word and concept, see J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: SCM, 1961) 206–238; P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989) 106–112.

⁹ Of particular interest is the promise that those who do good will be given eternal life at the final judgment (2:7,10). This has given rise to endless discussion. For two differing views, see G. N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1–4* (JSNTSup 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); T. R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 179–204.

“by the trespass of one, many *died*” (5:15);
 “the judgment followed one sin and led to *condemnation*” (5:16);
 “by the trespass of one, *death* reigned through the one” (5:17);
 “the result of one trespass was *condemnation* for all” (5:18);
 “through the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners” (5:19;
emphasis added).

“Death” and “condemnation” are in parallel and mutually interpreting. The grounds for condemnation and the cause of death is sin, rooted in the sin of Adam, but repeated by all of his descendants (5:12,16,20).¹⁰

This paragraph also identifies the solution both to the corruption inherited from Adam and to the sin committed subsequently. Each of the previous affirmations about sin and judgment is immediately countered with a more emphatic affirmation concerning the righteousness and life which comes through Jesus Christ.

“the gift in grace by the one man Jesus Christ abounded to the many” (5:15);
 “the gift followed many sins and resulted in justification” (5:16);
 “those who receive the abundant grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ” (5:17);
 “the result of one righteousness is justification that brings life to all” (5:18);
 “through the obedience of one, many will be made righteous” (5:19).¹¹

Condemnation and death are dethroned by justification and life through Jesus Christ.

So the condemnation of sin and justification through the alien righteousness of Christ are prominent themes in the first five chapters of Romans. Consequently it is no wonder that when *katakrima* recurs in 8:1–2, it is commonly read against the background of 5:12–21.¹² Yet the concepts of

¹⁰ While this is widely debated, many interpreters agree that all are sinners because of Adam and because they sinned. Dunn calls this “the two-sidedness of humankind’s plight” (J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* [WBC 38a; Dallas: Word, 1988] 273–274; cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:278–279; Moo, *Romans*, 322–323; contra Murray, *Romans* 1:183–187, 204).

The analogy raises the possibility that all are correspondingly righteous both because of the righteousness of Christ and because in Christ they are transformed and so become righteous (which would support the contention of this article). But given the fact that all analogies consist of similarities in the midst of diversities, any proposed correspondence must be defended, not merely assumed. The only possible reference to dual grounds of righteousness in this passage comes in 5:19 (see below, n. 11).

¹¹ The meaning of *dikaioi katastathēsontai* (“will be made righteous”) is controversial. Some restrict it to the imputation of righteousness on the basis of the work of Christ (e.g. Moo, *Romans* 345 and n. 145; cf. Cranfield, *Romans* 1:291, who concedes that this is an assumption); others include the second aspect of transformational righteousness (e.g. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 284–285).

¹² Dunn, for example, comments: “*κατάκριμα* likewise recalls the thought to the great climax of 5:12–21, where the only other NT references occur” (*Romans 1–8* 415; cf. Moo, *Romans* 469; Barrett, *Romans* 145). This comes perilously close to the fallacy of “one word—one meaning” (see J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* [Fortress: Philadelphia, 1982] 39–42; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics* 115–121).

The most that these parallels show is that 8:1 may have—not that it must have or does have—a similar meaning. Moreover, given that the issue is the grounds, rather than the meaning, of *katakrima*, the recurrence of the word is of limited significance. What is crucial is the grounds given in 8:1–2. This can be established only by contextual exegesis, not by appeal to purported parallels.

sin, judgment and vindication appear again in 6:1–23, although with distinctly different associations.

3. *Death and Resurrection in Christ.* In 2:1–16 and 5:12–21, condemnation is the result of sin and issues in death. While the word *katakrima* does not reappear in 6:1–7:6, the concept of condemnation does, with much of the same vocabulary, preeminently “sin” as the grounds for judgment (6:1,2,6–7,10,11–13) and “death” as its consequence (6:2,3–4,8–10,11–13).

In the midst of these parallels, three significant differences emerge. First, the focus has shifted from non-Christians to Christians. Secondly, the means of averting judgment is personal righteousness, not the alien righteousness of Christ. Thirdly, the grounds of righteousness is no longer the death of Christ for sinners, but the death—and the resurrection—of Christians in and with Christ.

Shall those who are “under grace” continue sinning (6:15)? Not unless they want to face judgment. Christians cannot sin with impunity. Those who serve sin become its slaves, which leads to death (6:16). Slavery to sin results in death, Paul repeats (6:20–21). For the dense of mind or stubborn of heart, he repeats one more time: “the wages of sin is death” (6:23). Death is the judgment which threatens all who live in sin, whether or not they claim Christ.¹³

Reinforcing the parallels with 2:1–16 and 5:12–21, the antithesis to the sin-judgment-death complex is obedience, righteousness and life (6:15–23). Yet reinforcing the dissimilarity with the preceding passages, here the obedience and righteousness which bring life are personal, not vicarious.

Each time Paul warns of the judgment awaiting those who sin, he also promises righteousness and life to those who live for God. While sin results in death, obedience results in righteousness (6:16). Slavery to sin results in death, but slavery to God leads to holiness and ultimately to life (6:21–22). So life is the result of righteousness, and death is the judgment on sin, even for Christians.

This righteousness is grounded in Christ, yet not, as before, in the death and resurrection of Christ for sinners, but in their death and resurrection with him. It is a death to sin (6:2), a baptism into the death of Christ (6:3), a union with him in his death (6:5), a joint crucifixion which abolishes the body of sin (6:6), and liberates from bondage to sin (6:7). More is needed than death, and more occurs. Those who die with Christ are also raised with him (6:5) to a new life (6:4), a life shared with him (6:8), in freedom from sin and in service to God (6:10).

On this basis, Paul exhorts the Romans to live in a manner consistent with their identity: dead to sin but alive to God (6:11), submitting not to

¹³ Romans 6:23 is commonly applied to non-Christians in evangelism (see, for example, *The Four Spiritual Laws*, p. 5; *Steps to Peace with God*, n.p.). That is a reasonable extension, but it certainly does not correspond to authorial intent. More worrisome is the common assumption that since this verse applies to non-Christians, it excludes Christians. Yet Paul is specifically answering the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15); that is, he is addressing those who claim to be “under grace.”

sin's evil lusts but to God (6:12–13), employing their bodies not as instruments of wickedness but as instruments of righteousness (6:13).

Throughout 6:1–7:6, then, eternal life is conditional upon a righteous lifestyle, which is in turn grounded in union with Christ in his death and resurrection. This is not the death of Christ for sinners, but their death to sin—and their resurrection to holiness—with him (6:1–14). This transformation in Christ leads to the requisite holiness, and from there to eternal life (6:15–23). Where this transformation does not occur, slavery to sin persists and death ensues (6:16,22,23).

4. *Implications.* Thus far this analysis resolves one ambiguity in 8:1 and clarifies the other. There are two possible contextual grounds for the “no condemnation” of 8:1; either the substitutionary atonement of Christ on behalf of sinners (3:21–26; 5:12–21) or the death and resurrection of sinners in union with Christ (6:1–23).¹⁴ Acquittal may come either through justification or through sanctification. Which is in view here is not yet evident.¹⁵

But at least this much is resolved: whether justification or sanctification is in view, *katakrima* retains a forensic overtone. Whether the focus is on God condemning the sins of humankind (1:18–3:20; 5:12–21) or those of professing Christians (6:1–23) the metaphor is the same, and so is the verdict. All must give account for their lives at the end of time; God is the judge; death is the sentence.¹⁶

There is thus neither need nor justification for adopting the interpretation, “penal servitude.” This meaning is unprecedented, and such a referent is not warranted by the context. It borders on tautology: there is no longer servitude to sin for those who are in Christ because Christ has freed them from servitude to sin (8:1). Moreover, while sin does indeed lead to slavery (6:16), Paul never characterizes this outcome as specifically penal. On the contrary, the stated punishment for sin is death (6:16,21,23). Even in 1:18–32,

¹⁴ Murray is one of the few interpreters who recognizes the presence of both possibilities in the wider context. Concerning the antecedent to “therefore” of Romans 8:1, he comments:

If the apostle is thinking merely of freedom from the guilt of sin and from the condemnation which guilt entails, then we should have to find the basis of the inference in that part of the epistle which deals particularly with that subject (3:21–5:21). But if there is included in freedom from condemnation not only deliverance from the guilt of sin but also from its power, then the “therefore” could be related quite properly to what immediately precedes (6:1–7:25) as well as to the more remote context (*Romans* 1:274–275).

¹⁵ Thus Moo begs the question when he argues that “the judicial flavor of the word ‘condemnation’ strongly suggests that Paul is here thinking only of the believer’s deliverance from the penalty that sin exacts” (*Romans* 472–473). *Katakrima* retains a judicial undertone whether the solution is justification (Jesus bearing the penalty of sin, 3:21–26) or sanctification (the Spirit transforming believers, thus removing the sin which warrants the penalty, 6:1–10,15–18; 8:5–14).

¹⁶ This appears to assume a final judgment that assesses works, and not for relative rewards but for salvation (see H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 178–181, 551–556). There is considerable literature on the connection between judgment by works and salvation by grace. For a helpful survey, see P. T. O’Brien, “Justification in Paul and Some Crucial Issues of the Last Two Decades,” *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 89–95.

where God “gives them over” to their sin, death—not the giving over—is their sentence (1:32).¹⁷

This attempted redefinition appears motivated by a desire to avoid ascribing salvation to sanctification. Yet it does not solve the problem. Even if this expedient is allowed in 8:1, the same difficulty appears at greater length and in more detail in 6:1–7:6. Since the first clause in 8:1 is a summary statement, recapitulating what precedes, its meaning can be altered by a shift in the interpretation of a single word. That is not so easily managed for the whole of 6:1–7:6.

None of this proves that the escape from condemnation envisaged in 8:1–2 is due to transformational righteousness rather than to forensic justification. Nor does it intend to. At this point it is sufficient merely to identify the alternatives.

In the first half of Romans, then, condemnation is threatened in two distinct contexts: in 5:12–21 and 1:18–3:20, it is the sin and corruption of humankind which provokes the wrath of God; in 6:15–23, it is the sin of professing Christians. In each instance the peril is the same but it is averted by a different means: in the first, through the substitutionary atonement of Christ (5:15–18; cf. 3:21–26); in the second, through righteous living (6:16,22,23). Only a careful examination of the rest of 8:1–2 will disclose which is actually in view here.

II. THE GROUNDS OF ACQUITTAL

Commonly the grounds for the acquittal in 8:1 is thought to be substitutionary atonement in Christ. In some cases this view seems to be assumed on the basis of theological *a priori*: since Paul taught justification by faith apart from works, if verse one refers to justification, then the grounds identified in verse two must be the vicarious death of Christ, not personal holiness.¹⁸

The fullest argument for this interpretation comes from Moo, who offers four reasons for linking 8:1–2 with 5:12–21, and thus grounding the escape from condemnation in justification: (1) the word *katakrima* appears only in 8:1 and 5:12–21; (2) the judicial connotation of “condemnation” fits better the removal of sin’s penalty than the breaking of its power; (3) “in Christ”

¹⁷ Murray asserts: “Our enslavement to sin is properly viewed as the judgment to which we are consigned. . . . Hence freedom from condemnation must embrace freedom from the judgment of sin’s power as well as the judgment of sin’s guilt” (*Romans* 1:282). There can be no question that humankind needs—and in Christ receives—freedom from both the guilt and the power of sin. What is in question is whether guilt and enslavement are identified here as the judgment passed on sinners, or the condition into which they fall, with “death” being the actual judgment passed on them.

¹⁸ According to Hodge to suggest that “we are freed from condemnation [8:1] . . . by our inward sanctification [8:2,4], is to contradict the plain teaching of the Bible, and the whole drift and argument of this epistle” (C. Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972] 255). Lloyd-Jones insists, “Deliverance from condemnation is due always to . . . ‘justification’” (*Romans* 283).

(8:1) succinctly captures the relationship of believers to Christ as it is expounded in 5:12–21; and (4) both paragraphs ground life in righteousness.¹⁹ On these grounds, he concludes, “we are justified, then, in thinking that 8:1–13 or, probably, 8:1–17, restates and elaborates 5:12–21.”²⁰

These arguments are by no means conclusive. The first carries little weight, as noted above, for the concept of condemnation may appear where the word *katakrima* does not (as in 6:15–23). The second is nullified by 6:1–23, where judgment has no less a judicial connotation, though it is grounded in the commission of sin and removed by the breaking of sin’s power. The third argument actually favors a link with 6:1–23, where *en Christō* (“in Christ”) appears three times and the concept of union with Christ pervades the entire paragraph. In 5:12–20 the phrase does not appear a single time, and the emphasis is on the agency of Christ rather than on union with him. Finally, both 5:12–21 and 6:1–23 meet the fourth criterion. Both ground life in righteousness, but in different respects: 5:12–21 grounds life in the alien righteousness of justification, whereas 6:1–23 grounds it in the transformational righteousness of sanctification.

On the other hand, every indication in 8:1–2 points to sanctification as the means by which to avert condemnation. Relevant phrases and concepts include: (1) “in Christ Jesus”; (2) “the Spirit of life”; and (3) “set free from the law of sin and death.” When read against the background of the preceding chapters and the foreground of the rest of chapter eight, each of these terms in 8:1–2 clearly connects freedom from condemnation not with forensic justification but with sanctification.

1. “*In Christ.*” The deliverance from condemnation is granted to those who are “in Christ” (8:1). This description recalls neither 3:21–31 nor 5:12–21, but 6:1–23.

In 3:21–31 the dominant motif is justification *dia pisteōs* (“through faith”). The beneficiaries of salvation are described as “all who believe” (3:22), “the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26), “the one who is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28), “the circumcision” who is justified “by faith” or “the uncircumcision” who is justified “through faith” (Rom 3:30). Righteousness comes “through faith in Jesus” (3:22), “by faith” (3:28,30), “through faith” (3:30). Significantly, neither the phrases “faith” or “through faith” nor the motif of justification through faith appears in 8:1–2 or in its immediate context.

In 5:12–21, the dominant motif is condemnation and justification through the mediation of Adam and Christ. “Through one man” sin entered the world (5:12); “by the trespass of one” many died (5:15); grace came “by one man” (5:15); “by the trespass of the one man,” death reigned “through one man” (5:17); “through the one man,” Jesus, many will reign (5:17); “through one trespass” condemnation came upon all people (5:18); “through one act of righteousness” justification came upon all people (5:18); “through the dis-

¹⁹ Moo, *Romans* 472–473.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 469.

obedience of one man” many became sinners (5:19); “through the obedience of one” many become righteous (5:19). Here the Adam-Christ analogy and the concept of mediation play the central role; neither the analogy nor the concept appears in 8:1–2 or its context.

Instead, 8:1–2 recalls the language and concept of participation characteristic of 6:1–11. There is no condemnation for those “in Christ Jesus” (8:1), for they have been liberated “in Christ Jesus” (8:2). This is reminiscent of baptism “into Christ Jesus” (6:3a), baptism “into his death” (6:3b), burial “with him” (6:4), crucifixion “with [him]” (6:6), death “with Christ” (6:8), life “with him” (6:9), life to God “in Christ Jesus” (6:11).

Significantly, what they have “in Christ” according to chapter six is neither justification through faith (as in 3:21–31) nor vicarious righteousness (5:12–21) but inner transformation. Baptism into the death of Christ (6:3) explains how believers died to sin and why they can no longer live in it (6:2) but are now to walk in newness of life (6:4). Sharing in the death of Christ leads to sharing in his new life (6:5). The crucifixion of the old man exterminates the body of sin and brings deliverance from slavery to sin (6:6). Death and resurrection with Christ entail dying to sin and living to God (6:8,10).²¹

Interpreted against this background, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because they no longer live the sort of life that warrants judgment. But this cannot be established purely by background, nor need it be. The claim of 8:1 is grounded in 8:2, as the conjunction *gar* indicates.²² Is “no condemnation” grounded in justification or in sanctification? Verse two clarifies.

2. “*The Spirit of Life.*”²³ The work of the Spirit is anticipated in 7:6 and developed extensively in 8:3–15. Throughout, his role is to transform sinners so that they live for God and thus receive eternal life. In both respects he is

²¹ This exposition of union with Christ in his death and resurrection uses a variety of prepositions and prepositional compounds in addition to *en* (“in”); e.g. *eis* (“into,” 6:3); and especially *syn* (“with,” 6:4,5,6,8). Yet Paul draws together the previous affirmations with the exhortation: “Thus also you, reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God *en* Christ Jesus” (6:11). Subsequently he also promises that the gracious gift of God is eternal life *en* Christ Jesus (6:23). Which, inverted, is merely a restatement of the promise that there is no condemnation for those who are *en* Christ Jesus (8:1).

²² I use the term “grounded” loosely, and in a syntactical sense, rather than in the narrower theological sense of meritorious or efficient cause. At this point it suffices to establish that syntactically 8:2 identifies the grounds for 8:1. The third section of this article explores the precise nature of this connection and its theological implications.

²³ The actual phraseology is “the law [*nomos*] of the Spirit of life” (emphasis added). This use of *nomos* has led to considerable discussion. At issue is whether it applies to the Spirit as “a power or authority” (Murray, *Romans* 1:276; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993] 482), or whether it refers to the Torah as the Spirit works through it (Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 416; Barrett, *Romans* 145–146; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991] 209). Against the latter, 8:3 indicates that “the law” was unable to do what “the law of the Spirit did.” So, too, in 7:22–23 there are at least two “laws” in view: the law of God and another law, the law of sin.

“the Spirit of life”: in changing the way people live, and in reversing their eternal destiny.

This first comes into view in the transitional statement of 7:4–6. Semantic parallels highlight the contrast between the old way of life and the new:

- (a¹) they died through Christ,
- (b¹) so that they might bear fruit to God (v. 4);
- (a²) previously their lusts had held sway,
- (b²) so that they bore fruit to death (v. 5);
- (a³) now they have been released through death,
- (b³) so that they now serve in the newness of the Spirit (v. 6).²⁴

Two features warrant comment. First, death through Christ and life in the Spirit are connected. Specifically, the former is the grounds of the latter: they died through Christ (a¹, a³) with the result that they now live in the Spirit (b³). Secondly, both are elements of the one process, namely, sanctification: through Christ they died to their lusts (a¹, a², a³), so that through the Spirit they might bear fruit to God (b¹, b³) rather than to death (b²).

In 8:3–4 Paul repeats both points with minor variations. The ministry of the Spirit is again grounded in the work of Christ: God sent his Son with the ultimate result that they walk in the path of the Spirit (8:3–4). In part, this involves justification: Christ came as “an offering for sin.”²⁵ For the rest, it includes sanctification. In Christ sin is mortified: “he condemned sin in the flesh.”²⁶ In the Spirit righteousness proliferates: the requirements of the law are fulfilled in those who live—and by virtue of their living—in

²⁴ In order to focus on the elements germane to the present discussion, I have omitted the several references to the law. The latter has been the focus of Pauline scholarship over the last two decades. This has brought helpful insights, but perhaps has led to an imbalanced preoccupation with the problem, and to relative neglect of the solution. For two recent discussions among the vast body of literature, see Schreiner, *Law*; F. Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994).

²⁵ There is considerable discussion whether *peri hamartias* carries the general meaning of “to deal with sin” (Murray, *Romans* 1:280) or the technical meaning of “sin offering” (P. Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994] 119–120). Nothing in this passage requires the latter, but it is arguable on the basis of the Septuagint.

²⁶ Murray objects to the common interpretation of this phrase as a reference to the removal of the guilt of sin through the vicarious suffering and death of Christ. He notes that the expiation of sin is elsewhere not called the “condemnation” of sin, and also that in this context the emphasis is on deliverance from sin as a ruling power rather than deliverance from its guilt (*Romans* 1:277; cf. Cranfield, *Romans* 1:382–383). The former has less force than the latter (because “condemn” here is probably a pun suggested by the context: God condemned sin so he could avoid condemning sinners).

Moo protests that “while it fits the context, and may be an implication of what Paul is saying, this view illegitimately eliminates the judicial connotations of ‘condemn’” (*Romans* 480). His objection is not to the proposed meaning, “execute,” for he himself interprets this phrase as “God’s executing his judgment on sin in the atoning death of his Son” (emphasis added). Rather he is apparently objecting to the application of the text to the removal of sin’s power in the sinner, rather than to the removal of sin’s guilt and God’s anger through “the atoning death” of Christ.

But *katakrima* can refer either to the passing of judgment alone or to the execution of sentence as well (1 Cor 11:32; 2 Pet 2:6). So the destruction of sin’s power has no less judicial connotation than the removal of its guilt.

accordance with the Spirit (8:4).²⁷ The Spirit builds on the work of Christ in justification and complements his role in sanctification.

These verses are all the more instructive because they are a direct elaboration of 8:1–2 (*gar*, 8:3). In Christ there is no *condemnation* (8:1), for God *condemned* sin in the flesh (8:3); the pun is clearly intended. Similarly, the Spirit not only liberates from the *law* of sin and death (8:2), but, and conversely, also engenders righteousness sufficient to satisfy the *law* (8:4); pun again intended. These parallels tie the statement in 8:1–2 closely together with its explication in 8:3–4.²⁸ Given that the latter clearly refers to sanctification, this is a strong indication that the former does as well.

The indications become incontrovertible in the next paragraph. The contrast between living according to the flesh and according to the Spirit introduced in 8:4 becomes the theme for 8:5–11. The “flesh”-“Spirit” antithesis encompasses more than opposing ethics: each term describes a concatenation of lifestyle, nature and orientation. Those who live in accordance with the flesh (8:4) are in essence characterized by the flesh (8:5a) and their fundamental orientation is toward the flesh (8:5b). Conversely, those who live in accordance with the Spirit (8:4b) are in essence characterized by the Spirit (8:5c) and their fundamental orientation is toward the Spirit (8:5d).²⁹

The succeeding verses draw out the ramifications of these contrasting orientations. Alignment with the flesh is characterized by death; with the Spirit, by life and peace (8:6). The former is rancorous toward God, does not submit to him, and, in fact, cannot do so (8:7). Those who are in the flesh are utterly and finally unable to please God (8:8). Those who have the Spirit, on the other hand, live in the Spirit; conversely, anyone who does not live in the Spirit does not have the Spirit and is not a child of God (8:9).

²⁷ This interpretation of 8:4 is widespread (though it is not always allowed to influence the interpretation of 8:1!); e.g. Murray, *Romans* 1:283–284; Cranfield, *Romans* 1:384; G. D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 534–537. Others refer 8:4 to the vicarious obedience of Christ; e.g. Stuhlmacher, *Romans* 120; A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 319.

Moo argues that 8:4 must refer to Christ fulfilling the law as our substitute, because the passive mood indicates that it is something done in and for us, and because our obedience “always falls short of that perfect obedience required by the law” (*Romans* 483). But this pays scant attention to the expansion of 8:4 in 8:5–11. Morris anticipates both objections when he comments,

In the full sense only Christ has fulfilled the law’s requirements, but when we are in him we in our measure begin to live the kind of life that God would have us live. Notice that Paul does not say “we fulfill the law’s righteous requirement,” but that “the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us,” surely pointing to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer (L. L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] 304).

For more detailed discussion, see Schreiner, *Law* 150–153.

²⁸ Contra Boice, who in the effort to avoid grounding justification in sanctification suggests that the former is the focus of the early verses before giving way to the latter. But he is not clear on where the transition occurs. Once he divides 8:1–4 from 8:5–11; another time, 8:1–2 from 8:3–4 (J. M. Boice, *Romans: Volume 2. The Reign of Grace; Romans 5:1–8:39* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992] 784, 798–799).

²⁹ As Paulsen observes, “Dependence on *σάρξ* or on *πνεῦμα* determines the nature of the whole person, including all of a person’s thoughts and aspirations” (H. Paulsen, “*ἁγωνίζω*,” *EDNT* 3:439).

This transformation by the Spirit produces righteousness and results in life (8:10).³⁰ The process culminates in them as it did in Jesus: with resurrection to eternal life, achieved in their case through the Spirit (8:11).

So the Spirit actually gives life in three different senses: he brings dead sinners to life in Christ (8:9), empowering them to live for God (8:10), thus delivering them from the condemnation of death and ensuring their resurrection to eternal life (8:11). In all three respects he proves himself to be “the Spirit of life.” Returning, then, to 8:1–2, it is evident why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ: not because of his death as their substitute, but because he gives the Spirit of life to transform them.

Eventually the “indicative” gives way to an “imperative,” but apart from that, the point remains the same. Addressing Christians, Paul repeats the somber warning of 6:23: “if you live in accordance with the flesh you are going to die” (8:13a). At the same time he offers encouragement: “If, however, by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (8:13b).

Perhaps of all the intervening material, this last text from 8:13 provides the most concise commentary on 8:1–2. The threat of death hangs over all who live in the flesh. But those who are in Christ have the Spirit (8:9) who frees them from the flesh and empowers them to live for God, thus delivering them from condemnation.

3. “*Set Free from the Law of Sin and Death.*” What is the nature of this liberation: does it involve forensic justification or moral transformation? One clue to the answer is the identity of the forces which previously held them in bondage. Was it the guilt of sin, now annulled through the substitutionary atonement of Christ, or the power of sin, now rendered impotent through transformation by the Spirit? Theologically, the obvious answer is, “Both!” Exegetically, however, only the latter is explicitly in view here.

The metaphor of freedom and its antithesis, slavery, do not appear at all in the earlier portions of the epistle which refer to justification, including 3:21–31 and 5:12–21. But both metaphors appear often in chapters 6–8, and always with regard to mortification and regeneration.

The “old man” was bound to sin; freedom came only when the body of sin was crucified and destroyed (6:6). Only by dying can anyone be freed from sin (6:7).³¹ In this, Christ is their model: death no longer rules over him because he died to sin and, now risen, lives to God (6:9–10). Like him, they

³⁰ The phrase *to pneuma zōē* (“the Spirit is life,” 8:10), has given rise to extensive discussion. Due to the parallelism with the previous clause, *to sōma nekron* (“the body is dead”) some view it as a reference to the human spirit (Sanday and Headlam, *Romans* 198). But this argument overlooks the distinction between verbal and semantic parallelism. Given that *pneuma* (“Spirit”) in chapter eight is consistently a reference to the Holy Spirit, and given that *pneuma* is characterized by “life” (especially 8:11), a reference to the Holy Spirit is more likely (cf. Cranfield, *Romans* 1:390; Dunn, *Romans* 1–8 431–432; Morris, *Romans* 309).

³¹ The parallelism between verses 6 and 7 indicates that *dedikaiōtai* (“has been justified,” 6:7) is antithetical to *douleuein* (“to be enslaved to,” 6:6), and thus means “freed from sin” (cf. Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 320–321; contra Cranfield, *Romans* 1:311, n. 1). Clearly, then, Paul did not restrict the term “justify” to the concept of justification, at least not to what Protestants call “justification.” This does not belie the conceptual differentiation between justification and sanctification. It

must not allow sin to reign over them, obeying its lusts (6:12). They are not to offer themselves in service to sin, for then sin would once again become their master (6:13–14).

People are slaves of those to whom they submit, whether slaves to sin or to obedience (6:16). Though the believers in Rome had been slaves to sin, they were freed from sin and were enslaved to righteousness (6:17–18). As a result, they have taken on a new obligation, parallel but antithetical to the old: just as they used to serve sin, now they are to serve righteousness (6:19). When slaves to sin, they were free from all obligation to righteousness (6:20); now free from sin, they are enslaved to God, obliged to serve him (6:22).

Shifting analogies without changing the point, Paul appeals to the marriage relationship. A wife is bound to her husband so long as he lives, but when he dies, she is free from the law with respect to her husband (7:2–3). Similarly, Paul’s readers were bound by the law, the flesh and sin; but by dying, they have been released so that they can belong to Christ and live for him (7:4–6).

Recognizing the potential for serious misunderstanding, Paul digresses to clarify the role of the law in the reign of sin. For those who are in the flesh, the law arouses sin and produces death (7:5). The blame does not lie with the law, for it is spiritual and serves a useful function (7:7). Yet despite all its virtues, the law suffers from one decisive inadequacy: it cannot overcome sin (7:8).

At one time, before the law, I was alive; but then the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died. I found that the commandment which was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin seized the opportunity provided through the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment, put me to death (7:9–11).

In this sense, the law of God could be considered “the law of sin and death,” in so far as its holy and salvific purpose is subverted and perverted by sin, resulting in death (cf. 7:8–11).³²

Yet Paul is clearly uncomfortable with this way of putting the matter, for it is easily misunderstood. As a safeguard, he repeatedly vindicates the law, and lays the blame on sin (7:7,8,9,10,11,12). The law is neither intrinsically bad, nor is it responsible for the misfortune which befalls humanity. Nonetheless, it remains true that sin twists the law to its own ends, in order

merely reinforces two truisms of modern semantics; namely, the distinction between word and concept, and the importance of context in determining the meaning and referent of a word (see Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics* 135–139, 175–178; M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983] 138–148). Perhaps Paul is also deliberately constructing a pun on *dikaioō* in order to stress the intimate link between justification and sanctification.

³² Barrett, *Romans* 145; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 419. On the other hand, *nomos* (“law”) may refer not to the Torah, but to the “dominating power or principle,” that sin leads to death (cf. 7:21–23; Murray, *Romans* 1:276; Cranfield, *Romans* 1:376; J. Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960] 157). As often, the cause for the disagreement is the ambiguity of the text; either view is arguable.

to bring death (7:13). The blame for this outcome rests on sin, which enslaves those who wish to serve God and produces in them the sin they so desperately abhor (7:14–20). Thus the problem in view is not the objective guilt which arises from sin (though obviously such guilt exists), but the moral corruption which enables sin to pervert the holy law of God into an instrument of oppression and judgment.³³

This governing force is so powerful and universal that it can be considered a rival authority and power, a law (*nomos*) so to speak, a competitor to the law of God (7:21). So two opposing authorities compete for their adherence: the law of God claims their aspirations (7:22); the law of sin controls their behavior, leading them to death (7:23–24). Paul summarizes and personalizes this schizophrenia: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24). Here he pleads not for judicial vindication through the death of Jesus, but for radical transformation which breaks the control of this law and puts to death the propensity toward sinning.

The answer comes in 8:2, “The Spirit of life freed you from the law of sin and death.” Throughout the entirety of chapters six and seven, the cause of bondage has been the power of sin (not its guilt); its consequence has been death. Correspondingly, deliverance requires liberation and transformation, not acquittal. This is precisely what the law could not do because its purposes have been perverted by sin (8:3; cf. 7:8–11).³⁴ So God does it, breaking the power of sin at the cross of Christ (8:3), and sending the Spirit to empower righteous living (8:4). Together the Son and the Spirit accomplish what the law could not: they defeat sin and achieve righteousness (8:2), thus bringing freedom from condemnation (8:1).

Deliverance comes not through the death of Christ on behalf of sinners, but through their own death in Christ and through their transformation by the Spirit. These latter are, of course, not two different paths to freedom; for it is in (union with the dead and resurrected) Christ that the Spirit sets them free (8:2).

III. SANCTIFICATION AND SALVATION

The natural reading of these two clauses, then, is that sanctification averts condemnation. Hendricksen is one of the few commentators to ac-

³³ Some take this liberation from law in a comprehensive yet indeterminate sense: “they have been freed from the law and its curse” (R. Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans* [London: Banner of Truth, 1966] 315; cf. Stott, *Romans* 218). At issue in this context is specifically the use of the law to enforce bondage to sin and death (7:23,25). The liberation needed is not sweeping freedom from the law, but freedom from the corrupting domination of sin and death working through the law (Cranfield, *Romans* 1:364; Barrett, *Romans* 145).

³⁴ Murray rightly comments:

In the barely declarative sense the law could condemn sin; this is one of its chief functions. But the law cannot execute judgment upon sin so as to destroy its power. As the apostle had shown repeatedly in the preceding chapter, the law, rather than depriving sin of its power, only provides the occasion for the more violent exercise of its power. To execute judgment upon sin to the destruction of its power the law is impotent. This is exactly what God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (*Romans* 1:278–279).

knowledge this, when he writes: “What Paul is saying is that for those who not only *forensically* are in Christ—the guilt of their sins having been removed by his death—but also *spiritually*—the sanctifying influences of his Spirit dominating their lives, there is . . . no condemnation.”³⁵ This raises the specter that justification is dependent on sanctification, and that salvation depends on works. Interpreters adopt a variety of expedients to guard against this implication, mostly by offering alternative explanations of the conjunction *gar* (“for”).

1. *The Function of “gar.”* Some, to be sure, find this proposition theologically acceptable. Hendricksen, for example, simply explains that “Justification and sanctification always go together. . . . The expression ‘no condemnation’ implies both pardon and purification.”³⁶

Calvin, more sensitive to the problematic implications, clarifies that sanctification (or regeneration) is the manner in which, not the grounds on which, condemnation is averted.³⁷ Probably the most popular solution portrays sanctification as the fruit and evidence—not the grounds—of justification.³⁸

While theologically true, perhaps, this all plays a bit too fast and loose with what Paul actually says here. This is brought home forcibly by a comparison of 8:2 and 8:3. Both clauses begin with *gar*, yet the first is purportedly consecutive (introducing sanctification in 8:2 as the consequence of justification in 8:1), while the second is widely taken as causal (introducing the work of Christ in 8:3 as the grounds of sanctification in 8:2).³⁹ It is not at all clear that *gar* is ever consecutive.⁴⁰ In any event, such an interpretation would need to be defended exegetically, not assumed on the basis of theological *a priori*, lest Paul’s actual point be obscured.

How can justification through the atoning work of Christ (3:21–26) be reconciled with averting condemnation through personal holiness (8:1–2)?

³⁵ W. Hendricksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 245 (emphasis original).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 245.

³⁷ His rationale is theological rather than strictly exegetical:

Someone may object that in this case the pardon, by which our offenses are buried, depends on our regeneration. This is easily answered. Paul is not here assigning the reason, but merely specifying the manner, in which we are delivered from guilt. . . . The sentence, therefore, means the same as if Paul had said that the grace of regeneration is never separated from the imputation of righteousness (Calvin, *Romans* 157).

Flawless theology, perhaps, but questionable exegesis: elsewhere *gar* does not introduce a modal clause.

³⁸ E.g. Cranfield, *Romans* 1:372, 374; Schreiner, *Law* 151–152, 203–204.

³⁹ Thus, Cranfield writes: “The implication of the *γάρ* [in 8:2] is that the fact that this further liberation has taken place is confirmation of the reality of the fundamental liberation described in v. 1” (*Romans* 1:374). Yet in 8:3 he understands *gar* in its usual causal sense:

The *γάρ* indicates the connexion between vv. 3–4 and v. 2: the presupposition and basis of the liberating bestowal of the Spirit (and of the absence of condemnation for those who are in Christ) are God’s decisive deed in Christ (*Romans* 1:378).

The distinction appears to be theologically motivated.

⁴⁰ According to LSJ (338), *gar* commonly introduces the “reason or cause of what precedes,” though it can also be more generally explanatory, again of what explicitly or implicitly precedes; cf. BDF §452; BAGD 151.

How can escape from condemnation be contingent upon sanctification without descending into justification by works?⁴¹

To deal adequately with these concerns would require an entire article. For the moment, perhaps it will suffice to sketch the rough outline of a response.

In brief, the anxiety surrounding 8:1–2 is misplaced, both textually and theologically. Textually, 8:1–2 functions essentially as a summary of what precedes in 6:1–7:25, and as a thesis for what follows in 8:3–39. That is to say, the problem perceived in 8:1–2 is no less a feature of the entire three chapters. Theologically, the absolute contrast between grace and works (common in populist evangelicalism) is an exaggeration of their opposition. Romans 6–8, no less than 8:1–2, indicate that good works are a precondition for—albeit not the meritorious cause of—eschatological salvation.⁴²

2. *Sanctification: Necessary but Not Meritorious.* In Romans Paul is evidently responding to concerns that his gospel is antinomian. His response divides into basically two sections. In chapters 1–5 he substantiates his message that justification is through faith and apart from works. In chapters 6–8 he refutes the accusation that justification through faith makes works redundant (6:1, 15).⁴³ Because chapters 1–5 focus on the ground of justification, they portray works negatively: “by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before him” (3:20). Nonetheless, in chapters 6–8 works are portrayed positively, as the inevitable and necessary corollary of justification.

Righteousness is inevitable because those who are united with Christ in his crucifixion death are by definition united with him in his resurrection life (6:1–14).⁴⁴ Righteousness is necessary because the basis of divine judgment has not changed: sin leads to death, and obedience to life (6:15–23). Moral

⁴¹ Some attribute salvation by works to Roman Catholicism (e.g. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 270, 290). But to be fair, Catholic theology (if not populist Catholic beliefs) is a good deal more nuanced than that. Fitzmyer provides a good example of Roman Catholic interpretation in his comments on 8:1:

Those who have put faith in Christ Jesus and have been baptized into his death, burial, and resurrection have become *justified* Christians, *not only liberated* from such evils, *but also empowered* to live a new life as the result of God’s love manifested in the freeing acts of Christ Jesus (*Romans* 479–450; emphasis added).

In Roman Catholic theology, then, the term “justification” includes transformational righteousness, but this is a far cry from salvation by works. For a judicious assessment of the historic Catholic understanding of justification, see P. Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983) 67–74; A. E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 63–73. The grounding of justification in transformation is characteristic of Pelagianism and the Enlightenment, rather than of Catholicism (McGrath, *Justification* 66, 71).

⁴² Of course this cannot be taken in an absolute sense, as though sincere death-bed conversions are automatically invalidated. See the account of the Lutheran debate culminating in the *Formula of Concord* Article IV (C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [3 vols.; London: James Clarke, 1960] 238–240).

⁴³ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans* 1:103–104, 295–296; Dunn, *Romans* 50, 161, 301.

⁴⁴ Schreiner rightly comments, “I am not saying that righteousness in Paul is a transformative gift. My point is that even if righteousness in Paul is only forensic, salvation in Paul consists of more than this” (*Law* 204 n. 70).

transformation is thus a prerequisite for eschatological salvation: “If you live in keeping with the flesh, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (8:13).⁴⁵ In fact, God sent Jesus and bestows the Spirit for this very reason; namely, because sanctification—and not only justification—is necessary, and could be achieved in no other way (8:3–4).⁴⁶

At the same time, Paul takes considerable pains to preclude even the slightest hint that works are meritorious. This comes out most clearly in the familiar—but widely misconstrued—text, 6:23. Here Paul repeats what he has already said twice, but suggestively deviates from the carefully constructed semantic parallels:

- a¹ “[slavery] to sin results in death,
- b¹ to obedience results in righteousness” (6:16);
- a² “the consequence [of sin] is death. . . .
- b² the consequence [of holiness] is eternal life” (6:21–22);
- a³ “the wages of sin is death,
- b³ but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).

In 6:23, as in the parallels, sin still results in death (a^{1,2,3}), but now eternal life is a gift from God (b³) rather than either the “wages” (a³) or the “result” (b¹) or “consequence” (b²) of holy living. Or rather, eternal life is simultaneously the result of holy living (b^{1,2}) and the unmerited gift of God (b³). That is to say, righteousness is a necessary, but not meritorious, prerequisite for life.⁴⁷

Paul reinforces the necessity but non-meritorious character of works by juxtaposing “imperative” and “indicative.” The paragraph begins with an

⁴⁵ As originally intended, in refutation of the sacrament of penance, it is true that “the pardon granted in justification applies to all sins, past, present, and future, and thus involves the removal of all guilt and of every penalty” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 514; Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 272; Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 3:163). But in the hands of antinomianism, uninhibited by a recognition of the inevitability and necessity of sanctification, this slogan encourages presumption.

⁴⁶ Populist Protestant theology is preoccupied almost exclusively with justification, but the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplish much more than that, including access to the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14), rescue from Satan’s tyranny (Eph 1:18–2:6), racial and ethnic reconciliation (Eph 3:8–12; Gal 3:28), eschatological perfection (Rom 8:18,23; 1 Cor 15:42–49), ecological restoration (Rom 8:19–22), and, of course, liberation from bondage to sin.

⁴⁷ Because populist evangelicalism tends to absolutize the contrast between faith and works, it has trouble with both halves of this verse. The warning (“the wages of sin is death”) is commonly restricted to non-Christians, though Paul issued it originally to Christians (6:1,15). The promise (“the gift of God is eternal life”) is commonly supposed to have no preconditions, righteousness least of all (for that would purportedly amount to justification by works).

Affirming the necessity of works for salvation, while denying them any merit, Calvin comments on the broken parallelism of 6:23.

Why, as he contrasts life with death, does he not also contrast righteousness with sin? Why, when setting down sin as the cause of death, does he not also set down righteousness as the cause of life? The antithesis which would otherwise be complete is somewhat marred by this variation; but the Apostle employed the comparison to express the fact, that death is due to the deserts of men, but that life was treasured up solely in the mercy of God. In short, by these expressions, the order rather than the cause is noted (J. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* [2 vols.; London: James Clarke, 1957] 3.14.21).

implicit exhortation, in his warning that sin leads to judgment while obedience leads to righteousness (6:16). Then follows praise to God for having freed them from sin and enslaved them to righteousness (6:18). A second exhortation urges them to serve righteousness (6:19) and is followed by a reminder that God has freed them from sin and enslaved them to himself (6:22). Eternal life is a gift (6:23) in the sense that God both empowers and rewards the fulfillment of the conditions he set.

Similarly, throughout 8:1–11, the emphasis is not on what Christians must do but on what God does in and through them. They escape condemnation in Christ (8:1), because the Spirit liberates them (8:2). God made this possible by sending Christ (8:3) and condemning sin (8:4). Consequently the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in them (8:4), through the initiative and direction which the Spirit provides (8:4). The Spirit transforms their fundamental values (8:5–6), their orientation (8:7–8), and their lifestyle (8:9), thus delivering them from death to life, already now and also at the final resurrection (8:10–11).

Only after all this “indicative” does Paul switch to a brief “imperative.” He exhorts his audience to live for God and warns that their eternal destiny depends on it (8:12–13). Even then, however, he guards against salvation by works, for the way Christians live reflects—it does not secure—their salvation: “those who are led by the Spirit of God, these are the children of God” (8:14). They do not become children of God by following the Spirit. Rather, as children of God they are given the Spirit of sonship to lead them in holiness (8:15).⁴⁸

So the disavowal of works in chapters 1–5 and the insistence on works in chapters 6–8 are not contradictory but complementary. As Ridderbos insists,

The contrast “faith” and “works” . . . is not to be understood in any other way than as a contrast between the grace of God on the one hand and human achievement as the ground for justification on the other. That faith and works, however, are mutually exclusive only in this sense, but for the rest, where meritoriousness is not in question, belong inseparably together, is evident from the whole of Paul’s preaching.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Schreiner reaches a similar conclusion in his exegesis of Romans 2:26–29, and invokes 8:1–4 for support:

Even though Paul asserts that no one can attain salvation by good works, he also insists that no one can be saved without them, and that they are necessary to obtain an eschatological inheritance. The Spirit’s work in a person produces obedience to the law (Rom. 2:26–29). The saving work of Jesus Christ radically changes people so that they can now obey the law they previously disobeyed (see Rom. 8:1–14). The works that are necessary for salvation, therefore, *do not constitute an earning of salvation but are evidence of a salvation already given*. The transforming work of the Spirit accompanies and cannot be separated from the justifying work of God. Such good works manifest the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. We should also stress that Paul is not demanding perfect obedience but obedience that is significant, substantial, and observable. (*Law* 203–204; emphasis original).

(Nonetheless, while I agree thoroughly with these sentiments as applied to 8:1–2, this does not constitute endorsement of every detail of his interpretation of 2:26–29.)

⁴⁹ *Paul* 179.

Works are not the meritorious cause, but they are a necessary prerequisite, for escaping the final judgment.⁵⁰

Historic Protestant theology sought to capture both of these complementary truths in the aphorism: “saved through faith alone, but saving faith is never alone.”⁵¹ Populist evangelicalism often emphasizes the former at the expense of the latter. The result is complacency untouched by any trace of urgency.⁵²

IV. CONCLUSION

Glimpsing an aspect of Pauline teaching that makes us uncomfortable, the first reaction may be to reduce cognitive dissonance through facile harmonization. But sometimes disquiet is indicative of important theological discrepancies or imbalances in need of correction or adjustment.

The interpretation of “no condemnation” in 8:1 is a case in point. The assumption that this must be dependent upon justification reflects an underestimation of the need for sanctification characteristic of much of contemporary evangelicalism. As Paul looks ahead to the final judgment, his expectation of deliverance is grounded in (at least) three acts of God: substitutionary atonement in Christ (3:21–26), personal transformation by the Spirit (8:1–14) and the ongoing intercession of Christ (8:34).⁵³ Due to its

⁵⁰ The reluctance to admit works as a precondition for salvation may be due in part to the double reference of justification. Within systematics, the concept of justification often functions as a comprehensive term for the commencement of the Christian life, inclusive of reconciliation, propitiation, liberation, and so forth. In this sense, works must be excluded even as a precondition.

But technically, justification is a forensic metaphor and is arguably proleptic—much like eternal life—anticipating the final judgment and the verdict to be rendered then; e.g. Gal 5:5 (so L. L. Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* [Leicester, UK: IVP, 1983] 191, 202; Ridderbos, *Paul* 161–166). N. T. Wright admirably captures both aspects of the technical metaphor when he observes: “The verdict issued in the present on the basis of faith (Rom. 3:21–26) *correctly anticipates the verdict to be issued in the final judgment* on the basis of the total life (Rom. 2:1–16)” (“Justification,” *New Dictionary of Theology* [ed. S. Ferguson and D. Wright; Leicester, UK: IVP, 1988] 360; emphasis original).

Confusion over this distinction is apparently what led Bucer to his theory of double justification (on which, see A. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* [2d ed.; Blackwell: Oxford, 1993], 111–112). A focus on the former to the neglect of the latter leads to denying works any role in justification.

⁵¹ The *Westminster Confession* (XI.2), for example, declares:

Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all the other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

See also the *Formula of Concord* Article 3.3 cf. 3.8; Calvin, *Institutes* 3.3.1; 3.14.17–21; M. Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1954) xvii.

⁵² It is, of course, possible to err on the side of other extreme (though obsession with holiness seems much less a problem today than presumption). Paul guards against this also, with an emphatic assurance of the efficacious love of God (8:28–39). This includes a reference to the intercessory activity of Christ at the right hand of God (8:34), an implicit reminder that the standard demanded is not perfection.

⁵³ It must not be assumed that all three grounds are parallel in function. Medieval theology, and at times also the Reformers, distinguished between final, efficient, meritorious, instrumental

polemical roots and its ongoing confrontation with moralism, populist Protestantism has necessarily stressed the first of these essentials. Unhappily, this has led to an inadvertent and relative neglect of the second and third.⁵⁴ Romans 8:1–2 is often cited in support of that imbalance, when it properly provides a much needed counterweight.

and formal causes of justification (see Toon, *Justification* 68–69). Calvin insists that when Scripture identifies the good works of believers as the ground of their salvation, it refers to none of these primary causes. Nevertheless, works function as a secondary cause:

There is nothing to prevent the Lord from embracing works as inferior causes [of salvation]. But how so? In this way: Those whom in mercy he has destined for the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary administration, introduces to the possession of it by means of good works. What precedes in the order of administration is called the cause of what follows. For this reason, he sometimes makes eternal life a consequent of works; not because it is to be ascribed to them, but because those who he has elected he justifies, that he may at length glorify (Rom. viii.30) (*Institutes*, 3.14.21).

More briefly, he writes elsewhere, “We, indeed, allow that good works are required for righteousness: we only take away from them the power of conferring righteousness” (J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959] 317).

⁵⁴ The importance of the ongoing intercession of Christ for believers should not be minimized, even though it receives no attention in this article. In 8:33–34 Paul identifies two grounds on which Christians escape judgment, the substitutionary death of Christ and his intercession for them:

a¹Who brings a charge against God’s elect?
 b¹God is the one who justifies.
 a²Who is the one who condemns?
 b^{2a}Christ is the one who died;
 b^{2b}indeed, who was raised,
 b^{2c}who is at the right hand of God,
 b^{2d}and who intercedes on our behalf.

If personal holiness were unnecessary, or if it were perfectly attainable, then there would be no need for Christ’s ongoing intercession. So this ministry confirms that holiness is necessary, even though perfection is elusive. This nullifies the objection that salvation cannot be contingent on sanctification because no one ever attains to adequate (i.e. perfect) holiness (contra Moo, *Romans* 483). At the same time, the emphasis is not on human effort, but on divine activity in justifying, in making atonement, and in interceding.