

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

CHANGING SIDES

FROM THE **OLD** MAN TO THE **NEW** MAN



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From the Old Self to the New Self

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

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Contents

Preface	12
1. The Sightseeing Flight	14
2. We've Landed – Now What?	24
2.1 Freedom or Slavery – but Not Both	24
2.2 Commandments of Freedom	25
2.3 Flee and Resist	26
2.4 Feelings	26
2.5 The Ship with the Old and the New Captain	27
2.6 Full Speed Ahead!	28
2.7 Our Father	28
2.8 What God Wants	29
2.9 HE Must Increase – but I Must Decrease!	30
2.10 The New Life in a Diagram	30
2.11 Everything Together at a Glance	33
2.12 Mountain Hikes	34
2.13 From Adam to Christ	35
2.14 What Had to Happen First for Our Salvation?	35
3. Romans 5:12-21: From Adam to Christ	37
3.1 Verse 12: How It All Began	38
3.1.1 Sin and Sins	38
3.1.2 Sin and Death	39
3.1.3 The Fall and Original Sin	39
3.1.4 A Simple Commandment	40
3.2 Verse 13: Sin before the Giving of the Law	41
3.3 Verse 14: Adam, a Type of the One to Come	42
3.3.1 Adam and Christ	43
3.4 Verse 15: Through Christ the Damage Is More than Made Good	43
3.5 Verse 16: The Effect of the Trespass and the Effect of the Free Gift	44
3.6 Verse 17: The Reign of Death Is Abolished through Christ	44
3.7 Verse 18: Condemnation and Justification of Life	45

3.8 Verse 19: The Legal Standing of Sinners and the Standing in Salvation of the Righteous	46
3.9 Verse 20: The Law Exposes All Sins	47
3.10 Verse 21: From Death to Eternal Life	48
3.11 Overview of Romans 5:12-21	48
4. Romans 6: Free from the Power of Sin	50
4.1 Changing Sides: From Adam to Christ	50
4.2 Verses 1-2: Is Grace a License to Sin?	51
4.2.1 We Have Died to Sin and Its Power!	51
4.3 Verses 3-4: Baptized into Christ and His Death	52
4.3.1 Baptism into Death	53
4.4 Verse 4: Raised to Newness of Life	54
4.5 Verse 5: United with Him in His Death and His Resurrection	55
4.6 Verse 6: The Old Self Crucified with Him	56
4.6.1 The Old Self	57
4.6.2 The Crucifixion of the Old Self	58
4.6.3 The Body of Sin	59
4.7 Verse 7: Acquitted from Sin	60
4.8 Verses 8-9: Sharing Death and Life with Christ	61
4.9 Verse 10: Christ, Who Died to Sin	62
4.10 Verse 11: Reckoning Oneself Dead to Sin but Alive to God	63
4.11 Verse 12: Sin's Reign over the Body Is Broken	64
4.12 Verse 13: Presenting Oneself to God Now	64
4.13 Verse 14: Not under Law, but under Grace	65
4.14 Summary	66
4.15 The Cross of Golgotha and Sin	66
4.16 Romans 6:15-23: Freed People Who Live under Grace	67
4.17 The Indicative and the Imperative of Salvation	67
4.18 Verse 15: The Goal of Grace	70
4.19 Verse 16: Slaves of Sin or of Righteousness	70
4.20 Verse 17: Obedient from the Heart – No Longer Slaves of Sin	70
4.21 Verse 18: Slaves of Righteousness	72

4.22 Verse 19: Placing Oneself at the Disposal of God's Righteousness and Holiness	72
4.23 Verses 20-22: From Fruitlessness to Eternal Life	73
4.24 Verse 23: Eternal Life instead of Eternal Condemnation	74
5. The Law in the Letter to the Romans	76
6. Romans 7: Free from the Law	78
6.1 The Meaning and Place of Romans 7	79
6.2 A Struggle of Spirit against Flesh?	79
6.3 Righteous and Sinners at the Same Time?	80
6.4 Born Again or Not?	80
6.5 Romans 7: A Necessary Experience?	81
6.6 Who Is the Person in Romans 7?	83
6.7 Romans 7:1-6: Dead to the Law	83
6.7.1 Verse 1: The Law Applies Only to Those Who Are Alive	83
6.7.2 Verses 2-3: The Only Way to Escape the Law	84
6.7.3 Verse 4: The One to Whom We Now Belong – Christ	84
6.7.4 Verse 5: The Law Does Not Promote Righteousness, but Sins	85
6.7.5 Verse 6: A New Service of God beyond the Law	86
6.8 Romans 7:7-14: The Perfect Law	86
6.8.1 Verse 7: Knowledge of Sin Comes through the Law	87
6.8.2 Verse 8: The Law Promotes Sin	88
6.8.3 Verses 9-11: The Encounter with the Law Leads to Death	89
6.8.4 Verse 12: Nevertheless the Law Is Good	90
6.8.5 Verse 13: Once More – the Function of the Law	91
6.9 Romans 7:14-25: Experiences of a Christian under the Law	91
6.9.1 Verses 14-15: The Good Will and the Weak Flesh	91
6.9.2 Verse 16: Agreeing with the Law	92
6.9.3 Verses 17-21: The Sin That Dwells in Me	92
6.9.4 Verses 22-23: Two Laws and Their Effect	93
6.9.5 Verse 24: Despair	94
6.9.6 Verse 25: The Lesson of Romans 7	94
7. Romans 8:1-11: Free at Last!	97
7.1 Already – Not Yet	98

7.2 The Breakthrough	99
7.3 Verse 1: Acquittal – No More Sentence of Condemnation	100
7.4 Verse 2: Set Free by the Law of the Spirit of Life	102
7.5 Verse 3: God Solves the Problem of Sin at Golgotha	102
7.5.1 God Becomes Man	103
7.5.2 Golgotha	104
7.6 Verse 4: God’s Law Is Fulfilled After All	105
7.6.1 The Mosaic Law and Its Validity	106
7.7 Verse 5: Being according to the Flesh or according to the Spirit	107
7.8 Verses 6-7: Death and Life, Hostility and Peace	108
7.9 Verses 8-9: Being in the Flesh and in the Spirit	109
7.10 Verses 10-11: The Spirit of God and the Rescue of Our Body	110
7.10.1 Our Standing in Salvation – the Indicative of Salvation – the “Already”	110
7.10.2 Living and Dying	110
7.10.3 God’s Spirit and the Body	111
7.10.4 Why Not Immortal Already?	112
8. Romans 8:12-17: The Imperative of Salvation – Living in Victory	113
8.1 Verse 12: No Longer Obligated to the Flesh	113
8.2 Verse 13: Life or Death	114
8.2.1 Promises and Warnings, and Eternal Salvation	114
8.2.2 Putting to Death the Deeds of the Body by the Spirit	117
8.2.3 “Reckon Dead” or “Put to Death”?	118
8.2.4 Putting to Death – How Does That Work?	119
8.3 Verse 14: Sons of God Led by the Spirit	121
8.4 Verse 15: The Spirit of Sonship Cries Out in Us: “Dear Father!”	123
8.5 Verse 16: We Are Children of God!	123
8.6 Verse 17: We Are Heirs of Christ’s Glory	124
9. Romans 12: The Mind Is Renewed!	126
9.1 God’s Goal for Us	127
9.2 Romans 12:1-2: Worship – a Logical Matter!	127
9.2.1 Your Bodies!	128
9.2.2 The World: Friend or Foe?	129
9.2.3 Transformation through New Thinking	131

9.2.4 Metamorphosis	132
9.2.5 Why Renewal?	132
9.2.6 How Does Renewal Happen?	133
9.2.7 The Battlefield of Our Thoughts	134
9.2.8 How Can We Win the Battle?	135
9.2.9 Daydreams and Wishful Thinking	136
9.2.10 The Will of God – Tested and Approved!	137
9.3 Romans 13:13-14: Putting On Christ – No Provision for the Flesh	138
9.4 Conclusion	139
10. The Old and the New – an Overview	140
11. What Is the Flesh?	142
11.1 Sin and the Flesh	143
11.2 The Flesh and the Unbeliever	144
11.3 The Flesh and the Christian	145
12. Flesh against Spirit	147
12.1 What Was the Problem?	147
12.2 The Working of the Flesh	148
12.3 The Christian in the Letter to the Galatians	149
12.4 Law and Flesh – Two Gears in One Transmission	150
12.5 The Age-Old Cosmic Conflict and the Present Personal Conflict	151
12.6 Live and Walk by the Spirit!	151
12.7 God’s Working and Our Working – a Contradiction?	152
12.8 Called to Freedom – but What Kind of Freedom Is It?	153
12.9 The Spirit Fights for Us	153
12.10 In the Midst of the Battle	154
12.11 The Viruses and the Vaccine	155
12.12 What Are the Works of the Flesh?	156
12.13 The Fruit of God’s Spirit	157
12.14 The Flesh Belongs on the Cross	159
12.15 Who Are You after Being Crucified with Christ?	160
12.16 Taking Up the Cross Daily	161
12.17 Living and Walking by the Spirit: To Be and Not to Be	162
12.18 Walking by the Spirit – How Is That Supposed to Work?	163

12.19 Stumbling and Getting Up Again	164
12.20 Getting Back on Track	165
12.21 Our Helper in Heaven	165
12.22 What If We Have Sinned?	166
12.23 Confessing	167
12.24 The Spiritual and the Carnal Christian – Do They Exist?	168
12.25 The Essence of the Conflict between Spirit and Flesh	170
13. New Self and Old Self: The Old Has Gone, the New Has Come	172
13.1 The New Self in the Letter to the Ephesians	173
13.2 The New Self in the Letter to the Colossians	173
13.3 The Old Self in the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians	174
13.4 The Creation Story of the New Self	175
13.5 Many Are One New Humanity	177
13.6 The Individual Personality Becomes a New Self	178
13.7 What Is the New Self?	180
13.8 The New Creation	181
13.9 What Was Newly Created?	182
13.10 Does the New Self Need Renewal?	182
13.11 The New Self: Put On like a Garment	184
13.12 Summary – a Picture	185
13.12.1 The Old Tree	186
13.12.2 A New Tree	186
13.12.3 The Old Root That Is Still Alive	188
13.13 Only by Faith	189
13.13.1 The Lazy Gardener	189
13.14 The Future of the New Self	190
13.14.1 Living the Life of the Future Now	191
13.15 Appeal	192
14. Born Again to New Life	193
14.1 What, Then, Is Nature?	194
14.2 Partakers of God's Nature	195
14.3 Eternal Life Is the Life of Christ	196
14.4 How Do We Become Partakers of the Divine Life?	196

14.5 The New Birth – Born of God	197
14.5.1 Born of Water	197
14.5.2 Born of the Spirit	198
14.5.3 Ezekiel’s Prophecy: New Hearts and a New Spirit	199
14.6 Rescued from Death to Life: Made Alive	200
14.7 The Mystery of Becoming and Growing	201
14.8 Growth – Life Grows	202
14.9 Cultivating	204
14.10 Hobby or Duty?	205
14.11 The Indicative of Salvation in John	205
14.12 The Imperative of Salvation in John	207
14.13 Eternal Life – Quality and Quantity	207
14.14 Signs of Life	208
14.15 The One Born of God Does Not Sin	209
14.15.1 Four Stages in Salvation History: Humanity and Sin	211
14.15.2 No Longer Sinning: Possible or Impossible?	211
14.16 Perfection – What Is It?	212
14.16.1 The Perfection of Our Standing in Salvation	213
14.16.2 Perfection (Maturity) in Our Lives: Growing Up	213
14.16.3 Complete Perfection in the Future Consummation	214
14.17 Responsibility for What We Do, Not for What We Are	214
14.18 The New and the Old Nature Are in Us at the Same Time	215
14.19 Conclusion	215
15. Temperament and Character	217
15.1 The Bible and the Theory of Temperaments	217
15.2 Character and How It Changes	220
16. Closing Words	222
17. Bibliography	

To our children, Felix, Laura, Alex, Peter, and Annemarie – with the heartfelt wish that they may take hold of Christ and be taken hold of by him.

Preface

The theme of this book has occupied me since my youth. It is the very heart of being a Christian. Only out of a salvation that has been fully grasped and understood is a liberated life possible. The maturity of a Christian stands or falls with what we have understood about the cross.

Being set free from sin is not a theory but a practical reality. Almost 30 years ago, Watchman Nee's book "Das normale Christenleben" (The Normal Christian Life) helped me to a breakthrough. Although I was a believer, I was frustrated, because I had nothing to set against the power of sin. This book opened my eyes, as it has opened the eyes of many others, to the freedom that I had long possessed in Christ but had not yet truly known. It is not about a higher level of piety or about being a Christian at expert level, but about understanding how God sees us and what he has placed in our hands.

The subject is a hot potato, especially for anyone who writes about it. Can I do so because I have arrived at 100%? Never. I am well aware that not many of us should be teachers, since teachers will receive a stricter judgment, for we all stumble often. But without biblical teaching and its constant repetition we have no chance at all of motivating others or of tackling the matter properly ourselves. Every generation must also face these themes for itself. There will be nothing, or hardly anything, in this book that others have not already written. But it is meant to encourage you to bring this central theme to life again and to get people talking about it.

I gladly accepted help. Above all, I thank Thomas Jettel for proofreading and for food for thought, which made a number of things easier to understand. I thank Josua and Brigitte Keller, missionaries near Nice, for the constructive exchange. I also thank Herbert Briem, Peter Streitenberger, and Harry Graf for a critical reading. Naming these brothers and sisters does not mean that we agree on every question, and so I myself am responsible for the content.

With few exceptions, I have used the Elberfelder Bible translation of 2003 (German Bible translation; Edition CSV Hückeswagen). The exceptions are generally marked.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf, Sulzberg, November 2010

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my high fortress.

Ps 62:6

Then you will live in safety and have an abundance of salvation, of wisdom and knowledge.

Isa 33:6 (NeÜ, German Bible translation)

1. The Sightseeing Flight

Climb aboard and fasten your seatbelt! We are going to take a wonderful sightseeing flight. Our destination is a great mountain range. We want to look at an impressive mountain massif from a bird's-eye view. I live right at the edge of the Alps and can look into the mountains from my office. More than once I have wished I could take off and take in this glorious creation at leisure from above. So far it has been limited to one short sightseeing flight, but that flight made me want more.

Today I would like to invite you on such a flight. It is a flight that costs nothing. It takes place in our imagination. What do you think: Which mountain range are we talking about? Imagine that this mountain range is the great salvation, the great rescue, of the eternal and almighty God. Imagine that this mountain embodies what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ through his death on the cross, his resurrection, and his ascension. This is not about just anything; it is about the *fullness of salvation*! On one flight you cannot see everything at once, but you are at least able to take in a great deal. And on every further flight you would be able to discover something new.

I promise you that this flight will not be boring – and not because the plane is small and only a two-seater. A light aircraft like that can get pretty badly shaken about, but what we will get to see will be so tremendous that we will forget everything else.

Our pilot knows his way around better than anyone. He knows the best routes, the best destinations, the most beautiful panoramas, the right heights and depths; he knows the weather, and he can bring us safely home again. That is why we can confidently leave our fear of flying on the ground.

The mountain we want to reach is Mount Elbrus, the highest mountain in the Caucasus range at 5,642 meters. That is a considerable height, and the plane really has to struggle to climb to this altitude.

What is special about this mountain? Of course, what sets it apart is that it is the highest in the Caucasus, but it is also an extinct volcano. It has a large crater out of which glowing lava was hurled long ago. Volcanoes, as we know from our own day as well, are uncontrollable and immense forces of nature. Such

forces of nature also broke loose when God flooded the world in the days of Noah. The springs of the deep and the windows of heaven were opened, the Bible says (Gen 7:11), to spread unimaginably vast amounts of water over the earth. Perhaps the enormous geological changes associated with this worldwide flood caused volcanoes to become active. In any case, the water back then rose above the tops of the mountains: All the mountains were covered (Gen 7:20); nothing but water could be seen.

The people of that time were very wicked. They had crossed the *point of no return* and had distanced themselves from God and from what he had intended for creation. So far that God drew a line under it all. I do not know what the full extent of their wickedness consisted of, but God saw it (Gen 6:5). And Jesus says that exactly such days will come again (Luke 17:26). The flood was to kill all people except Noah and his family. In this judgment we can clearly see what sin means to God. We often have no problem with sin, even though we are constantly confronted with its negative and terrible consequences. But how does God think about it? God hates sin because, like a deadly and incurable disease, it destroys people, his creatures, and separates them from him. Sin changes a person so much that he becomes an enemy of God. God hates sin because he loves us. He abhors sin because it is contrary to his whole being, his love, and his holiness. To the people of Israel the LORD says that he weeps in secret over their sinful condition (Jer 13:17; 14:17). Sin goes to *his* heart; it is not a matter of indifference to him. *He* knows every sin and feels it right into his heart. It separates people from God and people from one another. It is what attacks God and disregards his commandments. It cuts the lifeline from God to man and therefore can lead to nothing other than death. Sin can wear a friendly face, but that is only a mask: It is ugly and destroys wherever it appears. It is widespread. Wherever there are people, it is to be found. Everyone is affected. It clings to all of us like a tick, whether we want to admit it or not. Like a seed it lies in every human being from birth, though in one person it has developed more and in another less.

God hates sin, but he loves the sinner! That is our rescue! But sin and the human being have grown into one another; they form a unity that cannot be separated in any humanly possible way. If God were to destroy sin, his sentence of destruction would ultimately strike us! He has found a way and solved the

problem! It was not people who tackled the problem, for they deny their own *disease of sin*. For them, sin does not encompass what it is for God.

When the Eternal One created the universe, his almighty words were enough: “Let there be!” But to solve the problem of sin, words were not enough. Rather, it cost him all his love. God is unchangeable; he is like pure light; he is love; he is holy and righteous; he is pure and absolutely sinless. When it comes to sin, we should think of these attributes of God – and in divine dimensions! It is not about our tolerant and often adaptable notions. At Golgotha, the place where Jesus was executed, you can see how unimaginably serious God is about sin. There is no other place where it becomes more starkly visible that God loves the sinner but hates sin without limit. God sacrifices his own Son as a substitute for us human beings. Why was a bloody sacrifice necessary? Because sin is not just a trivial offense but something our Creator takes offense at and that insults him. That is why he rightly demands atonement and restitution for the damage we have done to God. It will always remain so that God will punish the sinner for his sin. Many people think that the idea that punishment follows wrongdoing is just a religious invention. Far from it! This fact is, for example, the foundation of our legal system. With God we simply have to imagine it much more purely and justly. He is all-knowing and reads every thought. He is everywhere present and thus himself a witness of everything people think, say, and do. Nothing escapes him. If you were alone in the world and had committed only one sin, even then the sacrifice of Jesus would be necessary. Even a single sin is unacceptable to God. He is too holy and glorious to be able to overlook even one single sin.

God does not treat human beings like a failed experiment in creation. He does not give up on man. He wants to spare and save the sinner. But for that he needs someone who *can* pay the debt. Is there a human being who can settle the bill? Yes! This one becomes the substitutionary sacrifice. He pays our debt. Jesus, the “Lamb of God,” becomes our substitute. A human being becomes – in a figurative sense – this substitutionary sacrificial lamb. At Golgotha the Son of God voluntarily placed himself, together with our sin, in the immediate presence of God in order to take on our condemnation and punishment. God accepts his Son’s willingness to sacrifice himself and does not spare him in this judgment. Would we give up our son to buy our enemies free from a problem they brought on themselves? Instead of punishing our son or our daughter,

would we not do everything to spare them? God did not. Yes, in order to redeem us, far more had to happen than merely a command or a word of creation.

Back to Noah: Back then the waters of judgment covered the highest mountain peaks. God was serious about sin, very serious! – And all the more so at Golgotha: Do we have any idea of the judgment that was carried out *there*, of the burden Jesus bore? Perhaps you are now thinking of how badly they had beaten him, pressed a crown of thorns onto his head, and nailed him to the cross. But let us wait a moment. *Those* were not the sufferings with which he paid for our sins. People did that to him. They contributed nothing to salvation. What they did proved once again how depraved human beings are. God's judgment, and the carrying out of the corresponding sentence on sin, began on that Good Friday only at the sixth hour, around 12 noon. Then, when the sun stood at its highest, it became pitch dark. The time of reckoning for our guilt had come. God's judgment of wrath fell with full force on the innocent sacrificial Lamb. For three hours our Lord Jesus gave himself up to God's wrath over sin (over my sin too) and took upon himself what brings all people into hell forever. That is darkness in the truest and deepest sense of the word. No one witnessed what took place between the Father and the Son in order to solve the problem of sin for all time.

We look down from the airplane window onto this mountain that was once a fire-spewing volcano. The red-hot lava reminds me of the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, of eternal hell. Yes, in our place our Savior himself endured everything that God feels in the face of sin, compressed into three hours! Corrie ten Boom used the following illustration: In a forest fire there is always a place where the fire can no longer find any fuel – the place where the fire has already raged. Golgotha is now the place where the sinner finds safety, because the fire of divine judgment on sin has already been here.

The psalmist, who speaks prophetically of this judgment of God at Golgotha, seems to be thinking of the flood: "All your breakers and your waves¹ have gone over me" (Ps 42:7; cf. 88:7). The roar of the forces of nature in the days of Noah (the masses of water, the storms, the earthquakes, the volcanoes, etc.) is only a faint foreshadowing of what the Lord Jesus Christ endured on the cross, and even more in the three hours of darkness – crucified

1. These breakers and waves symbolize divine wrath.

in weakness, in a tortured body, and in great pain. It was utter abandonment by God! God judged his Son. God's Son between heaven and earth – rejected by people and turned away by heaven! He went into the outer darkness for us. What a sacrifice! Take time to reflect on what he has done for you. Believe me, if you want to experience any change in your life, it begins with letting yourself be moved by Jesus' love. It is so great that it surpasses our knowledge. Paul says so too (Eph 3:19). He speaks of the breadth, length, height, and depth of this love. In Spain, French soldiers discovered an abandoned dungeon from the time of the Inquisition. They found a skeleton that was still chained to the dungeon wall. A cross had been scratched into the wall. At the four ends of the cross, in turn, the words from Ephesians 3 had been carved: at the top *height*, at the bottom *depth*, on the left *breadth*, and on the right *length*. The martyr who made this carving was filled with the love of Jesus, most of all in the hardest days at the end of his life of suffering. He had understood the meaning of the cross – the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge! And this martyr of the Inquisition was ready, for the sake of this love, to walk the path it called for and so to imitate his Master.

Up to now we have spoken of guilt, of sin, and of forgiveness. You are condemned for what you do. But what about the problem of our evil nature? Can forgiveness really be granted to us in view of the fact that we *are* sinners?

Why was what happened on the cross so unfathomably terrible? Because the Lord Jesus died not only for what I have done but also for what I am. Just imagine that you take responsibility for the great guilt of another person. That would be admirable. Now imagine in addition that you would not only be mistaken for this evil person but deliberately identified with him! That is only a faint comparison to what was at stake at Golgotha. The Bible describes our whole being as sinful. Sin dwells in us; it is involved in everything we do. Whether people are “big” or “small” sinners makes no difference. Believe it or not: You recognize this especially in yourself once you have been a believer for some time. It is not that you then still have to live with unforgiven sin. But you get to know the sin that dwells in us better and better. The longer you live in faith, the more you recognize how vile and repulsive sin is. And it makes no difference whether you were living in the middle of the world or in a Christian family when you came to faith.

When the Lord Jesus Christ died, he also solved the problem of the sin *in* us. We should clearly understand that this is why he was made sin. God condemned him as though he had been guilty of sin – not only of the deeds but also of the sin that is bound up with us. Not only were the fruits bad; the whole tree was rotten and useless. That is how the Lord Jesus Christ stood in judgment for us. After the three hours of darkness he cried out, “It is finished!” These are the most important words the universe has ever heard! In order to bear the sentence fully and completely, the Lord Jesus dies. The wages of sin, of our sin, is death – his death!

Imagine that God counts this death of Jesus fully to your account and credits it to you. Or, to put it in biblical terms: Our old self has been crucified with him! Our old life (everything we have done and everything we are) was given over to death with him on the cross 2,000 years ago. He died for it. For everything! There is nothing left for which we still have to pay anything. God’s sentence of condemnation will no longer strike us! Look out the window of the plane and take a good look at this mighty mountain! The volcano is extinct. In the same way the fire of God’s consuming judgment is extinguished, because Jesus took it upon himself. What do you see now? A white mountain! Everything is full of snow. If the volcano were still active, there could be no snow on the summit. But what the snow wants to tell us is clear. Hardly anything else speaks so clearly of the purity and blamelessness that have now become reality for us in Christ.

Purge me from sin with hyssop², and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Ps 51:7

Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD. If your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; if they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Isa 1:18

God has washed us clean. We could list so much more here that Jesus’ gigantic work has accomplished. At this point, just this one word of Scripture:

But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and holiness and redemption.

2. Hyssop is a leafy plant that was used for sprinkling water and blood.

1 Cor 1:30

Everything we did not have in our old life we now have through Christ, because God has placed us into him. That sounds strange, but it means nothing other than that God has identified us and joined us with Christ in such a way that everything Christ has done, and everything he now is as the exalted Son of Man in heaven, applies to us. God sees us in what his Son did and now is! That really is the summit of grace and salvation, isn't it? The calm and the stillness on this mountain, wrapped in a snow-white garment, show us that we now have peace with God and have already been placed in heaven in Christ. Yes, we are in Christ! That is why there is no longer any sentence of condemnation against us at all – neither for what we have done nor for what we are by birth. God did not want to improve us; he made a new beginning. But to start anew, the old must first be cleared out of the way. And since this is not about a thing but about people, the question arises: How can that happen? As already said: Only through death could our life be brought to an end. Christ died for us (and we with him). We did not literally die; rather, the death of another was credited to us. On the basis of his own righteousness, and in complete agreement with his righteous demands on us, God has (from a purely legal point of view) signed over to us entirely the substitutionary death of his Son. It counts as though we had actually died. On the cross our old nature was sentenced to death, and the sentence was carried out on Christ.

The mighty mountain shows us the greatness of God's righteousness and at the same time how small we are: He has done everything to free us from our sin without giving up even a trace of his righteousness:

Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are a great deep.

Ps 36:6

Sometimes we might become a little afraid again whether all this really applies to us quite personally. Are we perhaps taking too much for granted? The plane can sometimes be tossed back and forth; you can get quite a fright. But even if the storm of our feelings shakes us, this mountain remains just the same. No storm can move this mountain of salvation. This mountain of salvation is a mountain of grace and is like Mount Zion:

His holy mountain rises up beautifully, the joy of the whole earth; Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.

Ps 48:1-2 (ER, German Bible translation; cf. Heb 12:18-20)

While we are talking about mountains, something else comes to mind – a mountain in the negative sense, so to speak. The Grand Canyon is a huge gorge, a huge valley. It is truly impressive to stand before this abyss and look down into the depths. This, too, is a picture of us: We were nothing. We are dust, and to dust we shall return, because sin has entered our lives. Our hearts are like an abyss of evil. But now we look up to the “mountain of salvation” on which a cross stood. The cross is an end, but it is also a beginning:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

2 Cor 5:17

The pilot slowly reduces altitude so that we can now make out lower regions of this mighty mountain massif. Because of the size of the mountains you can never see everything at once. As we lose altitude, the pilot steers closer to the mountain. We see a mighty waterfall and then several smaller waterfalls as well. What a mighty spectacle unfolds before us! How majestically the masses of water plunge into the valley! Farther down, these waterfalls join to form a river. The masses of snow and ice store millions of cubic meters of water. On the slopes of Elbrus there are more than 70 glaciers from which the water drains away. It flows down into the valley and feeds meadows, fields, and forests. All of agriculture depends on it. Without this water there would hardly be any growth in those regions. Of course it also rains there, but it is especially during the snowmelt that the water needed for the growth of plants in spring pours down into the valleys.

The mighty streams of water that plunge down the mountain and then collect in the rivers symbolize the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus himself used this comparison. He was thinking of the deep thirst of human beings – the question of and search for meaning, security, and love – when he said that anyone who is thirsty should come to him and drink. Whoever comes to *him* quenches the thirst of his life, and that forever! The thirsty heart can find rest in him.

The Lord Jesus speaks of living (that is, flowing) water, of a spring that he himself is. We may take God's Word seriously; it is certain: God's eternal, holy, and mighty Spirit has been granted to us abundantly. He lives in us. He is a lasting and inexhaustible spring of life, of power, of guidance, of comfort. Only God himself can be a spring in us that never stops bubbling up.

I have to think of yet another mountain, where Jesus was with three of his disciples. They had hiked high up, perhaps as far as the snow line of that mountain.³ Suddenly Jesus was transformed before their eyes, and he shone like the sun. His clothes became whiter than the snow that surrounded them. They were granted a preview of what the Lord Jesus looks like when he comes to earth again. But at the same time it is also an expression of how we can picture the Lord Jesus now at the right hand of power. Incidentally, John says that the Holy Spirit could come only once Jesus had been glorified, that is, once he had taken this place of honor at the right hand of God. The Spirit of God was to be sent precisely by the glorified and crowned Son of God, so that he could bear witness to his victory and his glory and anchor them in our hearts.

The Spirit does not want to be a lodger in our lives. No, it is God's intention that this Spirit fill us, make Jesus great in us, lead us, and give us the victory of the overcoming life. Those are the facts! We will certainly go into the question of why it often does not look that way.

Let us enjoy this panorama! A mighty mountain, its summit in radiant, dazzling white, and the streams of bubbling water plunging from above into the valley. The dynamic of growth begins where there is good soil.

The flight is slowly coming to an end. We do not really want to land yet, but the fuel is running out. There is still enough for a few loops over the green, which grows ever denser and richer toward the valley. At first there is only scrub and a few green patches, then some trees, and before we know it we are flying over dense forest. Then we already see the fields, farmland, and plantations in the valley.

Do you actually know that in your heart, too, the water of God's Spirit has set in motion a spiritual but real growth? Salvation is indeed something perfect in itself, but in you it is at the same time a beginning. A new seed has sprouted in your heart. You have been born again. You are no longer the same as before.

3. Some commentators suspect that Mount Hermon, which is covered with snow for several months of the year above an altitude of 1,800 meters, was the Mount of Transfiguration.

That cannot be seen with the eyes. Purely outwardly (body weight, pitch of voice, etc.) everything about you is exactly as it was before. And yet something tremendous has happened. You have been born again and born of God himself. You can start all over again.

This seed is the eternal Word of God. He has planted eternal life in us, and this life grows. We will go into this theme more deeply in the next chapter. When we see all the green of the fields, trees, and plantations, we realize: It testifies to how strong the power is that God has placed in plant life. When the sun shines, the soil is good, and water comes from the mountains, then growth cannot be stopped. Do we believe that spiritual growth in people is less powerful, when it is not about plants but about human beings, the “crown of creation”?

After this exciting flight we land. We are still under the impression of the greatness and beauty of this mountain and its surroundings. We remember what we are: children of God. The guilt of sin has been taken away forever. What we were as the old self is history. It has been put away through the cross and cast behind God’s back. In place of the old self God has put a new self, which he created in the image of Jesus Christ. This new self has eternal life. Christ himself is its life – the one who has within himself the living water that makes it grow, so that it becomes mature and strong in faith.

The pilot makes a rough landing; we are back on the ground. Have we only been dreaming, or is everything we have seen true? Yes, it is true. God’s Word says so.

Perhaps this sightseeing flight has made you curious. On the following pages you will find more about what we have, in the truest sense of the word, only flown over. If so far we have only flown, you are now invited on mountain hikes that will take you to beautiful places.

2. We've Landed – Now What?

After a bumpy landing we come back down to earth, to the ground of the facts. If God's salvation is so comprehensive and not just my ticket to heaven, the question arises: How can it change my life? God himself wants us to live in freedom. He not only protects us from judgment; he also wants to redeem us from the slavery of sin and from the dictatorship of our old self-centered life. Salvation is not a theoretical matter. God's salvation is the word of the cross – the gospel, which is the power for salvation and therefore for life, to everyone who believes!

2.1 Freedom or Slavery – but Not Both

The Israelites were once in merciless slavery, without a way out and without hope of freedom. But God saw their misery, had compassion, and intervened. The Passover lamb, which protected them from judgment, was not yet their liberation. They experienced that only when they left Egypt behind them. What is that meant to tell us? Quite concretely: We, too, stand under the protection of the blood of Jesus, but beyond that we have been redeemed and set free for a new life.

The following example from more recent history makes clear, in a figurative sense, what matters. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States⁴ was submitted to the states for ratification on January 31, 1865, and took effect on December 18, 1865. It abolished slavery once and for all throughout the entire territory of the United States.

When this amendment had been signed in all the states, this law was valid immediately, with no ifs, ands, or buts. Now imagine the many slaves in the Southern states going about their work on that day. Although by law they were now free and had the right to leave their masters, many did not do so. First they had to know about this law. Then they had to believe that it was true, and finally they also had to claim their freedom and live as free people.

That is how it is with us. This “law of liberation” was signed 2,000 years ago at Golgotha. This law (like the one abolishing slavery) is valid to this day. The

4. *The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America.*

Bible says that we have been set free from the power of sin, in that our old self, as we already saw on our sightseeing flight, was crucified with Christ. That happened for me at Golgotha without any contribution of mine, through the historically attested death of Jesus. That is the message of the gospel: freedom! Some slaves knew nothing of this new law for a long time and lived as if it had never been put into force. We find unjustified slave labor completely unacceptable, don't we? But how many Christians live, consciously or unconsciously, as if there were no liberation through Christ. How many are glad that they will one day be in heaven. But this "law of liberation" from Golgotha applies here and now, not only in heaven! God has broken the power of sin. That means that we can claim this liberation entirely for ourselves by faith. We are to accept it as a fact that we have died to sin, that is, our old self has died with Christ. Reckon yourselves dead – the old is over! That is what Paul says, and he uses a term from financial bookkeeping. This is about the logic of facts, not the logic of changeable feelings.

2.2 Commandments of Freedom

We have to get the principles of freedom in Christ clear in our minds in order to experience them as well. First of all, it is about the facts of salvation, on which we rely in faith as realities that are valid for us, and not about a positive feeling of freedom.

The second follows from the first: When I am tempted, when sin is crouching at the door, when I must decide for sin or for God, then this applies: You do not have to sin; you are free! Call this fact to mind. Ask God to remind you of it. We do not need to freeze in fear in the face of sin; rather, the NT calls on us to take active steps against sins in our lives. We are to root out these sinful things consistently. God did the same thing at Golgotha when he judged sin in his Son.

The biggest problem of our time is perhaps individualism. We ourselves are at the center and revolve around ourselves. That does not help us in our life with God. Let us look away from ourselves and look to Christ. That is our victory!

- Trust God's salvation for your liberation as a historical fact!
- When sin wants to reign, remind yourself again and again that its power is broken!

- Do not freeze in temptation; actively reject sin!
- Do not concentrate on sin and the struggle with it, but on Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit!

2.3 Flee and Resist

In such struggles, however, we must not overestimate ourselves. There are situations in which we are to take action, and those in which we are to go on the offensive. Sinful things we must condemn, remove, or get rid of. But from the temptation to sin and from its immediate surroundings we are to flee. Above all when it comes to sexual temptation, and also to greed and idolatry. Joseph embodies the example of fleeing at the right moment. Nothing but flight could keep him from climbing into bed with Potiphar's wife, who had prepared everything for committing sexual immorality.

2.4 Feelings

The gist of what the Bible says is this: Count on it, take it as given, claim it for yourselves, that you have died to the slavery of sin! The right to live as people set free has been granted to you! The slave in the Southern states would look at you in astonishment if you said, "I don't feel this liberation." He would tell you that you do not need to feel it at all, because the signed law is legally valid. After all, that law does not care what you feel. It is always valid – regardless of what I feel. Watchman Nee gives an apt illustration: "Fact, Faith, and Experience were once walking one behind the other along a narrow wall. Fact turned neither to the right nor to the left nor backward, but strode steadily ahead. As long as Faith, behind him, kept his eyes fixed on Fact, all went well. But when he began to worry about Experience and looked around for her, he lost his balance and fell off the wall, and good old Experience tumbled down after him."⁵

Of course, feeling plays an important role in the Christian life. Feeling is a necessary and wonderful part of being human. Joy is experienced as a feeling (an emotion), and God wants us to rejoice; he even commands it. Joy given by him is a result of salvation. It can be experienced, it can be felt, and it is genuine. But faith and trust do not include feeling, because feelings are subject to fluctuation. For faith, what the Bible promises it is true and real. Faith soberly claims for itself – with or without feeling – what God promises it. The

5. Watchman Nee, *Das normale Christenleben* (The Normal Christian Life), p. 47.

mountaineer hanging over the abyss must trust 100% in the manufacturer's specifications for his climbing ropes. His feeling plays no role.

2.5 The Ship with the Old and the New Captain

Let us compare our life to a ship. Before our new birth we ourselves determined its course and destination. But a great change has taken place. The ship has been bought; it no longer belongs to us. The consequence is that there is a new captain. Who is that? It is still I, but God has given me new life and his Spirit. In Christ I have become a new self.

The old captain has a lot of experience and routine. In the past everything obeyed him. There were many habits that expressed how the old captain had run the ship. But now the purchase of the ship has been completed before a notary, and the change of ownership has been settled by contract. No matter how young and inexperienced the new captain is, he has lawfully become the new captain. The old captain – let us compare him to sin, to our flesh, or to the old sinful nature – will stay on the ship until the day of our complete redemption comes. That is a situation that is hard to understand. But it is the reality of our Christian life. The old captain is still on the ship, but he has to withdraw into a cabin. He may no longer interfere in the running of the ship. The new captain, however, must make sure that the old one stays where he belongs, and at the same time concentrate on the ship's course: He now stands at the helm. He is on the bridge, where the decisions are made. The new shipowner is Christ in me, who works through the Spirit of God. The NT says that these two, namely flesh and Spirit, oppose each other and both claim dominion over our life. While the flesh raises this claim wrongly, the claim of God's Spirit is legitimate, because we have been bought by God.

Out of habit the old captain keeps wanting to meddle in the new captain's business. He would love to take over the ship again and banish the new captain to the cabin where he himself belongs. So a tension remains on the ship. It is much smaller when the new captain simply and plainly appeals to the contract – no matter how he feels. He should send the old one back to the cabin again and again. If he does not do that and lets the old captain stroll around the ship, things could end badly. The more attention, notice, and consideration the old captain receives, the more often he will be standing at the helm again.

2.6 Full Speed Ahead!

The new captain's motto is: Full speed ahead! We have taken command of the ship of our life. In Christ we are to reign in life, and we can. Finally being self-determined means living a God-determined and Christ-filled life. And into this we put our energy, our concentration, our interest, and our goals. They now belong to the new owner. The ship is sailing a new course; it has found a new purpose; it is sailing against the current. There will be storms, setbacks, leaks, but that will not stop us.

All the letters of the NT speak of the constant movement and the dynamic of change that belong to a Christian life:

- Run
- Put to death
- Grow
- Pursue
- Cleanse yourselves
- Be filled
- Be renewed
- Abound more and more
- Put off and put on

These and other exhortations make it clear that nothing happens by itself. God does not “conjure up” in our lives what we ourselves are to do (although everything is at his command). God's power is at our disposal, and trust in him is the channel through which this power flows to us. Nothing happens unless you do it! A true saying, also with regard to our sanctification. God wants our full commitment. Our salvation is surrounded by these appeals; they and our obedience to them belong to it as breathing belongs to life. These appeals simply follow the “logic of salvation.”

2.7 Our Father

A life of full commitment does not succeed every day. We are realistic enough to know that we have to deal with failure, small or great, every day. But our life lies in the hand of our heavenly Father. He is not a despot waiting for our mistakes. We are his sons and daughters, whom he bought at the infinitely high

price of the life of his own Son. We live out of this relationship of grace. We do not stand under a law that makes merciless demands, but under the grace of our heavenly Father. He encourages and helps; he motivates us and spurs us on again and again. He gives what we need for a life to his glory. In prayer we say “Abba” (dear Father) to him. He does not reproach us when something goes wrong or when weaknesses show up in our lives. To him we confess our sins, which unfortunately still happen. Every sin that we commit and do not confess impairs our fellowship with our heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ. That is why we are to clear it out of the way. If you lack courage and feel unworthy, if you think you are a failure, then let these words of God encourage you: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isa 42:3).

The step back into the Father’s arms is always possible. With him there is forgiveness, grace, and restoration, as well as a new beginning. With him you can become whole again, even when faith is weak and devotion has almost gone out. Samson was at rock bottom, but he was restored. His hair began to grow again, although sadly he did not get his eyesight back. It took time to get that far, but the day of his greatest victory came, even though he had previously suffered a great defeat through sin.

2.8 What God Wants

God does not demand anything of us that we cannot attain! He wants our heart; he wants joy and deep inner emotion when we think of him. God wants to make us happy. He does not want to exploit us or take away our joy in life. Sometimes Christians give that impression. How do we become happy as Christians? We find it in a life surrendered to him, and nowhere else. I quote Jay Adams: “In many Christians one notices a serious deficiency: They lack endurance, perseverance. Endurance is probably the key to an orderly, godly life. No one learns to ice-skate, ski, play the flute, tie his shoes, read, write, or drive a car unless he keeps trying long enough. You learn by persistently keeping at it, in spite of clumsiness and failure, until you have acquired the skill you are striving for. You learn by doing again and again what you want to learn. The Bible tells us that it is exactly the same with a sanctified way of life.

We must not misunderstand the emphasis that Scripture places on our own effort; this effort is rooted in grace and is not ‘a work of the flesh.’ Only

through the Holy Spirit can we gain endurance. But the working of the Spirit is not 'mystical.' The Holy Spirit tells us how he works: Scripture testifies that he works through Scripture.

As we willingly, prayerfully, and persistently obey the commands of the Bible, biblical ways of living become part of who we are. We read the Bible and ask God to help us put what we have read into practice. That is why he has given us the Holy Spirit. The word 'grace' has many layers of meaning. One aspect is 'help.' The Holy Spirit helps those who read his Word and then dare in faith to do what he says. He does not promise us the power in advance. Often it comes (only) as we do what is required of us.²⁶

2.9 HE Must Increase – but I Must Decrease!

This was the life goal of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. It is a process that we want to take over from John, knowing that it will last our whole life! The diagram illustrates what this simple and yet difficult sentence of John says: The minus applies to our old life and to our own goals and interests, while the plus clearly applies to our Lord!

(Diagram: two curves running in opposite directions on a time axis; the decreasing curve is marked with a minus sign, the increasing one with a plus sign.)

- Putting off the old self –
- Putting on the new self +
- Growing and soon perfect Christlikeness
- The racecourse of faith
- The process of growth throughout life
- New birth
- Coming of Jesus and resurrection

2.10 The New Life in a Diagram

The following diagrams (square, circle, triangle) represent different people. The first row shows how the person is born, the second the development of his personal life, and the third the new birth. The fourth and fifth rows show how he grows in faith or lives according to the flesh, while the sixth row represents the goal, perfection with Christ.

6. Jay E. Adams, *Grundlagen biblischer Seelsorge*, p. 255.

The three shapes serve to distinguish any people at all, just as they are born. The difference may lie in their origin and social background, in the particular character of the person, in different temperaments and natural gifts. All in all, it is about the individual person as he or she differs from other people. That was the person's identity at birth, without having contributed anything to it. It is what the person himself, with few exceptions, cannot change: his structure. This is represented by the empty shapes in the first row.

The shapes do not stay empty. A human being is born a sinner and sins. His personality structure is shaped in the wrong direction by sin. Sinful habits develop, which in turn form a bad character. This is symbolized by what now fills the shapes. Even if there is moral good in a person, he is nevertheless marked by the sin that dwells in him. The filled shapes show the person before the new birth.

God does not reform the human being; he creates something new. The new is tailored entirely to the individual personality. Just as all variants of human personality were already present in Adam, so it is with the last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ. He became man and can therefore live in every individual person. The Bible compares this fact to a seed that is planted in us: It is meant to grow from the first day, so that our nature is changed into the nature of Christ. The divine seed corresponds entirely to the shape of the personality. So the qualities a person has by creation (that is, the inherited ones) are not changed by the new birth. "We must assume that God is somehow able to insert into every human being something completely new that fits perfectly with his personality, which he never intended to destroy."⁷ The nature of Christ now enters the individual personality of each person and so becomes a unique expression of the nature of Jesus. This is an expression of the diversity and richness of the new creation, just as they are already present in the first creation.

(Diagram in six rows, each with a square, a circle, and a triangle)

(Row 1: the three shapes gray and empty)

Different people as they are born with their individual personality

(Row 2: the shapes are filled with many small black shapes)

Before the new birth, the individual personality is filled with the experiences of everyday life. Character is formed. Besides good character traits, there is often behavior that comes from the evil heart and is sometimes predominantly

7. Custance, Arthur C., *Man in Adam and in Christ*, p. 171.

marked by sin. The content of the square, circle, and triangle corresponds to what the person has become without God.

(Row 3: in the middle of each shape a small white shape of the same form appears)

On the day of the new birth, the divine seed of the Word of God is planted in the person. Christ himself is now the believer's new spiritual life. This new life is adapted to the person's personality. That is made clear by the correspondence between the small and the large shape (e.g., small square and large square). The new birth does not change the God-given individual personality that a person has by creation, but fills it with the new life of Christ. God's goal is the renewal and transformation of the personality born in sin into Christlikeness.

(Row 4: the white shape has grown; the black shapes have become fewer)

From the day of the new birth, the seed of divine life begins to grow. Christ takes shape more and more in the person through a steady process of growth. The old content, the old way of life, and old patterns of behavior diminish and disappear more and more. The seed keeps on growing; that is, the nature of Christ pervades, fills, and shapes the one who has been born again more and more.

(Row 5: in the square the white shape has become smaller again and the black has increased; in the circle and the triangle the white shape fills almost everything)

This Christian's life has not developed further. The old life has come to the fore again.

These two Christians have grown in faith. They have taken care to put to death the works of the flesh, to trust Christ as the content and goal of their life, and to serve HIM.

(Row 6: square, circle, and triangle entirely white)

In eternity every believer has a resurrection body, a body of glory. In it he is like Christ. At the same time he will be, for all time, the individual person that God let him become through his parents, or created him to be. In the consummation, sin and the sinful flesh are finally past and history.

The implanted seed is meant to grow, so that Christ and his nature pervade the personality more and more. That is God's goal. He himself gives the growth. But the extent and the speed of the growth are influenced by us. We are called to put off the old way of life, so that the lifestyle of the new self becomes more and more visible to those around us. The shapes in the diagram

always stay the same; only the content changes. We are called to remove consistently all other seeds and plants that do not come from God and his Spirit and that stem from the old life, so that God's seed can grow.

The fifth row makes clear that, sadly, things can also go backward, and the seed, Christ, no longer plays the most important role at the center of our life. The seed becomes smaller; the old self-centered life increases again.

Or the growth is steady, as shown in the circle and the triangle, where the personality has truly been taken hold of and filled by Christ.

In the end only Christ will be seen, in the perfection of heavenly glory. We will forever be ourselves, as God created us, but then without any sin, and yet like the Lord.

How big is God's seed in my life? How far has it grown?

2.11 Everything Together at a Glance

This diagram⁸ is a simple summary of the key factors of our Christian life, which stand in direct interaction with and dependence on one another. We have decided not to book salvation merely as a ticket to a blissful eternity. We want to experience the life that comes from God, his love, his joy, and his peace already now. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ gave up everything in order to possess us, so we want to place our life at his disposal out of gratitude.

That is not an impossible task. God wants our complete joy and contentment, and we experience them only in a life lived for God. Such a life has Christ as its center, as the content of life, its goal, and its future. One day he will fill every corner of the universe, and he fills us already now. This fullness pervades our whole being and changes us more into his image day by day. We ourselves notice this positive change least of all, but God is at work on us.

At the beginning stands the Holy Spirit. He is the power and basis of all action. Added to this is our daily experience, which shapes us and challenges us to do good, but also tempts us to do evil. That is the arena of faith in which the dramas of our life are played out, as we obey and trust and love the Lord of our life, whom we do not see.

In everything it takes our full devotion, our commitment, and the will to get serious. We must follow Jesus with an undivided and fulfilled heart and bring

8. Idea based on Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 347.

with us the readiness and discipline to set aside our own life, our wishes, and our advantages in order to gain true life.

(Diagram: a triangle with three arrows pointing from the top and from the two lower corners toward a circle in the middle; text at the top, in the circle, at the bottom left, and at the bottom right)

God's working in grace, power, and help through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and constantly stands by our side. His Word, the Bible, is the wisdom for our life. He wants to bring us safely to the final goal, but also to achieve with us his individual goal for our earthly life.

The nature and the life of Jesus Christ are the center and heart of being a Christian. Jesus is to take shape in us. God will conform us to the image of his Son. This process will be completed at the coming of Christ, but in moral respects it already begins on earth!

The reality of life, the racecourse of faith: everyday life with all its sinful enticements and seductions, but also the trials and attacks of the enemy and various tests in the training of our heavenly Father

Our faith and will, our decision and commitment, our effort, discipline, and endurance to keep going and keep running in the racecourse of faith in spite of our clumsiness, in spite of mistakes, setbacks, and failures, in order to reach the heavenly final goal

2.12 Mountain Hikes

Now that the sightseeing flight has left a strong impression, I would like to invite you on a few "mental" mountain tours. My children are rather averse to hiking, and I, too, have to make an effort to get myself going. But I have noticed one thing: When I see the many mountain peaks of the Allgäu Alps from my office, it is a priceless experience to have hiked up one of those peaks and enjoyed the view. You cannot buy that moment after a strenuous climb; you have to become active yourself. Looking out of an airplane is one thing, but going into the mountains yourself is another.

These mountain tours are not harmless strolls across flat country. What I am inviting you to are exciting mountain tours on which we patiently climb uphill and have both easy and difficult stretches ahead of us, but always keep the goal clearly in view: It is the facts of salvation, which we have already "*flown over*." Now we will deal with important details contained in the biblical teaching about

our standing in Christ and about what “Christ in us” means. The mountain tours are worth it. I myself have of course already made them while writing these lines, and they were impressive, stirring, enlightening, liberating, and very motivating discoveries.

Our mountain guide is to be the Holy Spirit, who has committed himself to leading us into the whole truth of God, the truth of the Bible. He concentrates on bearing witness to him, the Liberator Jesus Christ, and on making him great in our lives.

The first tour is the longest and most strenuous, but at the same time the most important. Once you have made it to this summit, the next one will not be so difficult. The letter Paul wrote to the Romans illustrates the righteousness but also the grace of God in the gospel. This letter will occupy us first. Nowhere else are these fundamental questions of salvation worked through with regard to us in this way. That is also the reason why we want to take the trouble here to climb up to the summit verse by verse.

2.13 From Adam to Christ

We are not boarding the Letter to the Romans at the front, but at the fifth “car” of this “train of grace.” Nevertheless, let us briefly indicate what is found in the first chapters: After the introduction in 1:1-17, Paul speaks in 1:18 – 5:11 about the *sins* of all humanity, through which it stands guilty before God (1:18 – 3:20). On God’s side, two facts of salvation are set against this hopeless situation:

- the redemption that God offers us without anything in return through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross (3:21-31)
- God’s resurrection power, which called Christ back to life (4:1-25).

The second part of the letter runs from 5:12 to 8:39. Here Paul deals with the question of what God does about our incorrigible sinfulness. It is about sin as a principle, as a strong power that is present in the human being. The question is: How can the righteous person *live* by faith (1:17)?

2.14 What Had to Happen First for Our Salvation?

If human beings are so corrupt, does something not have to happen within the person? “That would not be the right perspective. The apostle Paul has a completely different answer in the Letter to the Romans: In the first instance it

was not something *in* us that had to happen; something had to happen *outside* of us, in Christ. Besides the work of Christ for our *sins*, we must first think of the work of Christ for our *sin*, for that too is a fact of salvation. After that, only then and not before, does the work of the Holy Spirit *in* us come into play. The work of Christ *for* us must be clearly distinguished from the work of the Holy Spirit *in* us. The first work took place entirely outside of us, and it is finished; nothing more needs to be added to it. The second takes place in us, and it is far from finished; there is still much to be added. But it must be quite clear that the solution to the problem of sin (the power of sin, the root of evil) belongs to the facts of salvation just as much as the solution to the problem of sins. To put it another way:

- Liberation from sin takes place first of all outside of us, and as such it is part of justification (cf. the expression ‘justified’⁹ in 6:7); this is the work of Christ, accomplished once for all.
- After that, liberation takes shape in us, and that is part of sanctification, which will end in our glorification (8:30); that is the work of the Holy Spirit, which is accomplished step by step in the course of our earthly life.”¹⁰

9. See the note in the ER (Revidierte Elberfelder, German Bible translation).

10. H. P. Medema, *Romeinen 7 enzovoorts*, p. 44.

3. Romans 5:12–21: From Adam to Christ

When the Romans had listened intently to the reader up to 5:11, they could – although they had of course already come to faith and thus to salvation – breathe a sigh of relief once more. It seems as if it had only just happened: They had peace with God and in this divine court case had not been found guilty, but had been declared righteous by the Judge of all the earth. The theme of trespasses, and the fact that they are now no longer sinners but righteous, actually seems to be concluded with verse 11. So have all questions about sin and God's righteousness been settled once and for all? Evidently not. Things really get going all over again. Once more the apostle builds up a tension like the one we felt in the first chapters of this letter.

Where did sin come from? Where did death come from? Why are all people affected? What role does God's law play? And of course the question: Is there a way out of the vicious circle of sin, death, and condemnation? Perhaps some looked at each other in bewilderment, for had Paul not just let the jubilant cry of salvation ring out? Why should he now begin again with sin and death? The answer: The subject has not yet been fully dealt with. If you keep listening, it quickly becomes clear what it is now about. It is no longer about what people have done, by which they have proved themselves to be unrighteous and sinners. Now it is rather about the question: Why is that so? The subject now is *what man is*, why he sins, what the cause of sins is. Having previously dealt with the bad fruit, Paul now digs for the root. The sinner must not only be justified, that is, acquitted, of his sins, but also be redeemed from the power of sin. He came under its dominion through his connection with Adam – through the family tree of life, so to speak. This is his problem, and he is held fast in this connection; he cannot free himself from it. Until Christ came, there was no chance of escaping this connection.

This text shows the catastrophe of the Fall and its consequences. At the same time, however, through the contrast and the juxtaposition of the two main figures (namely Adam and Christ), it also makes clear how God has opened wide the way into life.

In this text Paul lays the foundation for chapters 6, 7, and 8. This text in fact serves as an introduction and preparation. Whoever reads carefully here will not find the following chapters quite so hard.

3.1 Verse 12: How It All Began

Therefore, just as through one man sin came into the world, and through sin death, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned ...

A single human being opened the door to sin. Not only into *his* life, but into the world. That means that everything that lives in this world is affected by it as well: All people die, because all have sinned. This man thereby also let in death and all the misery that goes with it. Like a spark, a first, seemingly trivial act set off a wildfire that is raging today more than ever.

This tragic figure is the historical Adam, the first human being, as can be seen at once. Paul knew, of course, that the first step toward disobedience came not from Adam but from Eve (1 Tim 2:14), but Adam kept silent and went along with it. He followed his wife, although *he* had received the commandment before Eve was there. He was therefore responsible for everything that happened.

Paul's theme is the contrast between two main figures, namely Adam and Christ, with whom all their "*descendants*" are connected.

3.1.1 Sin and Sins

Sin existed before Adam, for Satan has been sinning from the beginning (1 John 3:8). He approached the first human beings as a tempter. The tempter, the ancient serpent, is not mentioned here. Man acted in full personal responsibility.

The term "sin" here is not simply the singular of sins. Much more is at stake here. As can be gathered from this passage and the following texts, it is about sin as a principle hostile to God, a power that sets itself against God and his commandments. It is about sin as a life-threatening disease with a fatal course that has infected all people. The apostle John says, "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Sin therefore includes the rejection of God's authority (anarchy), in whatever visible or invisible form.

Watchman Nee compares sins and sin very vividly with the following situation: If you want to solve the problem of alcohol once and for all, it is not

enough to track down and destroy all the alcohol. The sources of supply, that is, the places where alcohol is produced, must be shut down and destroyed. So the alcohol itself stands for sins, while the factories symbolize sin.

3.1.2 Sin and Death

Adam and Eve knew that sin would bring death with it (Gen 2:17). God himself had announced death as the consequence of their eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Death began at the very moment they transgressed this commandment. This death immediately interrupted the undisturbed and trusting relationship that the Creator had with his creatures.

Death does not mean the extinction or cancellation of existence. It means separation and a change, or rather a deterioration, of the previous state. The NT speaks of a spiritual death. This does not mean the extinction of the human heart or spirit, but its inability to enter into a relationship with God. Here Paul is speaking of physical death as the consequence of sin.

Death is the inescapable and unavoidable (long-term) consequence of sin. Death spread to all people; it could not be stopped. That could have succeeded if one human being had not sinned and had thereby proved that he did not have Adam's nature. That has never happened among human beings; so far sinlessness could not be diagnosed in anyone. All are affected and sooner or later suffer death.

3.1.3 The Fall and Original Sin

This does not mean that Adam's fall is repeated in every human being, in that each one, as an innocent person like Adam, is faced with the choice of being obedient or committing a transgression. If that were so, there would be the possibility that perhaps one human being could manage not to sin and consequently would not have to die either. Paul wants to say that every human being has inherited Adam's sinful nature and that his life is therefore marked by sin. The line of descent has never been broken. There are two proofs of this: first death, but then also the fact that every human being has sinned. This differs from Adam's situation in that a person today is already morally weakened

(indeed, corrupted) by the sinful nature inherited from Adam and consequently sins. The theological term “*original sin*”¹¹ goes back to this text.

Through Adam’s transgression, sin has become a constant companion of every human being, in that, as a principle hostile to God, it has infected man in his entire existence like an incurable disease. It has taken hold of the whole person – his spirit, his soul, his heart, his mind, his will, and his body. Death as the consequence of sin has seized the immaterial part of man – his inner self – and brought about a spiritual death “in ... trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), and it has also affected the material part (the body). This too is ruled by death: The body is dead because of sin (8:10).

The history of each human being cannot be detached from his first ancestor. His history is not rewritten by his being given the opportunity to prove that he does not have to sin. He is a child of Adam with all the tragic consequences. No child that is born has to learn sin. Sin has been placed in his cradle, and only upbringing is able to contain the total outbreak of sin.

Some understand this verse to mean that we sinned (along with him) in Adam, that is, in his transgression. In that case we would be held responsible for a deed that we did not commit at all. The point is that through this deed Adam let sin into his life, and we as his descendants have inevitably inherited this nature. We ourselves can do nothing to change that.

3.1.4 A Simple Commandment

The transgression that had such devastating consequences was not a terrible sinful deed, not murder or robbery – no, it was the transgression of a very simple commandment. An act does not become sin only when it is especially terrible. Every act (from its origin in thought to its execution) is a sin as soon as it rejects, or even merely forgets, the authority of God, which is expressed here in a simple commandment.

In these chapters sin is hardly ever named in terms of sinful deeds, but almost always as the principle that stands behind all sinful deeds – that is, behind sins.

Sin is a principle that leads a person to take his life into his own hands and to disregard God’s will, or even his very existence. That does not necessarily result

11. German *Erbsünde*, English *original sin*.

in “horrible” sins. The life of a morally upright person who does not ask about God’s will is just as permeated by sin as that of a murderer or adulterer. It is this sin that the following chapters are about. The seed of sin has sprouted in every human being, even if it is not equally full-grown in all.

The great question toward which Paul is working is what God has done about this problem of sin. For that, forgiveness or reconciliation is not enough. God does not forgive what I *am*, but what I have *done*. Already in the first half of this fifth chapter the apostle says expressly that we “*were* sinners” and therefore are no longer. What exactly happened to bring that about? And how will God make sure that sin no longer reigns in the life of a believer, as is still the case with all who remain in the “*Adam family*”?

Verse 12 is interrupted by a longer parenthesis; it seems to break off in the middle. Since we know the whole text, let us, for the sake of better understanding, complete it here in our own words, similar to verse 18, where this verse 12 is continued after the parenthesis:

*Therefore,
just as through one man sin came into the world
and through sin death,
and so death spread to all men,
because all have sinned ...
... so through one man and his righteous act (Golgotha)
righteousness has come into the world
and through righteousness (eternal) life,
and so life has spread to all people.*

3.2 Verse 13: Sin before the Giving of the Law

*... for until the law sin was in the world;
but sin is not counted
where there is no law.*

Here a parenthesis begins that does not end until verse 17. Paul underlines that there is no way out of the connection with Adam – no matter at what time in human history, whether with or without the law.

Human history began with Adam, and so did the history of sin and death in the human world. Some 2,500 years probably passed before the Torah, the law

of Moses. The law makes sin tangible and evident, but it was already present in the time when this law did not yet exist. Paul thereby supports his main statement that it was through Adam that sin came into the world and remained in it. All his descendants became what he was: They proved to be sinners. Since Adam, sin reigned, even if it could not be called by name and reported through the law. This is confirmed not only by the death of all people in that period but also by the events of that time. The great flood in the days of Noah is probably the clearest example of this. Not least, Paul has already described in the first chapters of his letter the hopelessly corrupt condition of Adam's descendants before the time of the law. And if one were to apply the standard of the law retroactively to the time when there was no law, then, alongside the testimony of conscience, the fact would become evident that people sinned back then as well, because they were sinners.

3.3 Verse 14: Adam, a Type of the One to Come

*Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses,
even over those who had not sinned
in the likeness of Adam's transgression,
who is a type of the one to come.
(cf. Hos 6:7)*

The reign of death, from which no human being can escape, is an established fact and proves the equally merciless reign of sin. This is a further indication that sin is present even without a specific commandment. More than that: These words make unmistakably clear that people in that period were sinners not because they sinned (although that is also true), but because they were descendants of Adam. Even without a specific transgression people died, which proves that the connection with Adam is the problem.

Babies, who do not consciously sin, die because they are descendants of Adam.

The emphatic point is that the connection with our first ancestor Adam cannot be severed for any human being (with or without the law). All are born sinners because our first forefather fell into sin. That is why the following sentence is very important: We are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners and were born as such.

Sin has not only come into the world; it has reached into our hearts. Jesus says that evil deeds come out of the heart, from within, from our innermost being (Mark 7:21–23). They spring from the fact that we “*have become sinners*” (cf. Rom 5:19; Luther 1912, German Bible translation).

3.3.1 Adam and Christ

Now Paul discusses a fascinating juxtaposition of Adam and “the one to come.” The one to come is obviously Christ – the future belongs to him. Adam is thus a “*type*” of Christ. One could call it an antitype, because although the correspondence lies in the reach and effect of their respective acts, those acts are completely opposite. The first Adam stands for sin and death, the *last* Adam (1 Cor 15:45) for life and righteousness. The correspondence between the two persons consists in the fact that each can be described as the head, origin, or father of a human family. Both are representatives of their descendants, of their race.

3.4 Verse 15: Through Christ the Damage Is More than Made Good

*But is not the free gift like the trespass?
For if through the trespass of the one
the many died,
much more
has the grace of God
and the gift in grace,
which is through the one man, Jesus Christ,
overflowed to the many.*

Paul explains how Adam is a type by way of his contrasts with Christ. Adam’s trespass brings death to the many whose forefather he is. But the God of grace did not leave it at that. It is indeed the purest grace that takes care of this Adam family. It concerns not only those who, through no fault of their own, came through Adam’s trespass into their lost condition, marked by death and sin, but also those who themselves live by the motto of sin.

The grace of God brings forth a gift, namely a man who is set over against Adam. The gift in grace is a person through whom God’s grace pours forth in such a way that all the dams burst and every human being (no matter where he

is on this planet) can be reached. The grace in the person of the Son of God, the last Adam, is stronger than everything that came into the world through the first Adam. There were many who died, and there can be many who will live. God has not abandoned his humanity to death!

3.5 Verse 16: The Effect of the Trespass and the Effect of the Free Gift

*And is it not as through (the) one
who sinned,
so also with the gift?
For the judgment came from one (misstep) to condemnation,
but the free gift from many trespasses to righteousness (to justification, or to the verdict
of justification).*

Adam's momentous decision brings condemnation upon all – this is the legacy he left behind. From verse 15 onward God is spoken of, and therefore condemnation too. God carries out his righteous judgment and sentence on the sinner, and that can only mean condemnation. But the free gift in the man Jesus Christ leads to the justification of the sinner, the opposite of condemnation. That condemnation struck the Substitute in our place. Now it is not only Adam's trespass that stands accused; it is just as much about the many trespasses of his numerous descendants. The time of the law is now included as well.

3.6 Verse 17: The Reign of Death Is Abolished through Christ

*For if through the trespass of the one
death reigned through the one,
much more will those
who receive the abundance (the overflowing measure) of grace
and of the gift of righteousness
reign in life (that is, in the power of life)
through the one, Jesus Christ.*

God's grace is overflowing; it proves itself in an immeasurable abundance. Through it Adam's descendants receive the righteousness of God as a gift. Through Jesus Christ, the last Adam, they are snatched from the reign of death.

Death no longer reigns over them; no, they themselves reign in the power of the life of their risen Lord, as the next chapter will show. Through Jesus Christ they become victors – already now, and soon without any restriction in the new body, when they will be like Jesus.

Here the parenthesis begun in verse 13 comes to an end, in which Paul dealt with the particular issue of the presence of sin in the absence of a law. He has refuted all arguments that there might after all be exceptions on whom what Adam did would have had no effect. All human beings are inevitably connected with Adam and live under the consequences of his trespass.

It is a fact for every human being that the connection with Adam exists. This also applies to the so-called “do-gooder” who stands out through good deeds – Jew and Gentile alike. He cannot free himself from it. He must acknowledge this fact. But, as the next words show, he does not have to remain without hope: God has opened up a way out. Through God’s grace he not only gets back Adam’s innocent state, but through a new connection with Christ, his new “head of the family,” he receives far more than Adam ever had.

Adam’s commission was to rule over creation. But now he and all his descendants were ruled by sin and death. Yet those who receive the gift of righteousness will reign in life. This reign means that they can live as God wants – in freedom and to the glory of God. “Reigning in life” is the epitome of the fullness of life that we now have in Christ. In this new situation we can be the people who fulfill their purpose, namely people of God who live with him and from him. They are no longer ruled by death and sin in all their effects on human beings; they have been set free from bondage, in order now to be what God has destined them to be. Paul will work this out in detail later.

3.7 Verse 18: Condemnation and Justification of Life

*So then,
as through one trespass
it led for all people
to condemnation,
so also through one righteousness
it leads for all people
to justification of life.*

Once again the tragic deed of Adam, in its reach and its effect on all people, stands in contrast to the one deed of the one Righteous Man. Condemnation is God's righteous verdict on all people who have ever lived and ever will live. But the *one* righteousness, the *one* righteous act, stands there just as effectively. It comprises Christ's voluntary and obedient sacrificial death. This one incomparable and unique act will have its effect on all people without exception in just the same way. It brings with it the justification of the sinner. That was already presented in the first part of the letter. Now it goes even further. Now the *justification of life* comes into view. Life, which is stronger than death, now comes into play. Here it is not only about a court case in which the question of guilt has to be settled, that is, about what I have done. Rather, it is about the fact that I, as a human being, as a justified sinner, have a new life in which something in me has been changed. As a human being I have received God's righteousness, because I possess life from God, the life of the Risen One. I am acquitted, that is, justified, of my sins. But my existence, my new being in Christ, also bears the seal of God's righteousness. God's condemnation, his sentence, rightly strikes me not only for what I have done but also for what I am. But now I am in Christ and possess a new life. This text serves as the foundation for what Paul will go on to explain in more detail.

Justification brings with it the gift of life. Justification leads into eternal life. In my connection with the risen Christ I find myself in a completely new standing, which is now absolutely determined by a new Giver of life, by a new head: by Christ. In this state my whole being is included in God's justification.

3.8 Verse 19: The Legal Standing of Sinners and the Standing in Salvation of the Righteous

*For as through the disobedience of the one man
the many were placed in the standing of sinners,
so also through the obedience of the one
the many will be placed in the standing of the righteous.*

The standing of the sinner is a pitiable position into which he has come through the verdict of God: I have sinned because I am a descendant of Adam; in my entire existence I am a sinner and must be regarded as such.

The man Jesus Christ, who, unlike Adam, was obedient to the point of death on the cross, can open the way of life to us. The fruit of his obedience gives me

the possibility of taking the firm and secure standing of a righteous person.

It is an abstract juxtaposition of two main figures: Adam and Christ. This is not about how I live as a Christian. I know that I occupy the position of a righteous person. At the beginning of chapter 5 I come out of the courtroom acquitted, as it were. Now life goes on. What am I now? Before, it was about what I have done; now it is about what I am.

God has placed me in the standing of a righteous person and takes this position, which he himself created, seriously. He keeps to his own ruling; he is faithful.

All human beings are “automatically” born into the standing of sinners. The standing of the righteous is open to all. But it is granted only to those who believe (“many,” sadly not all).

3.9 Verse 20: The Law Exposes All Sins

*But the law came in alongside,
so that the trespass might overflow.
But where sin has overflowed,
grace has abounded all the more ...*

The law could not change anything for the better. It did not improve man’s situation; if anything it made it worse, for through the law sin overflowed even more. Instead of suppressing and containing sin, it brought sin to light even more.

The Mosaic law (at its core the Ten Commandments) made clear how strongly sin reigned. But God did not reveal his will through the law in order to have the last word with it and let man perish in the flood of his overflowing sins. He answered with his grace, which is boundless. So the comparison of the two main figures is not merely a juxtaposition but proof that God is greater, not only in power but also in grace.

The law exposed what had already been present before. People had been sinning ever since Adam. With the law, sins are now called by name. The law showed clearly how many sins a human being commits. With this law there is a divine, unchangeable, and incorruptible standard for what is good and evil.

3.10 Verse 21: From Death to Eternal Life

... so that, as sin reigned in death
(in the power of death),
grace also might reign
through righteousness to eternal life
through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

For those who are in Christ, the reign of sin, all the way to death, is now a thing of the past. For them grace reigns. But grace has God’s righteousness as its foundation. It is not cheap grace that simply overlooks everything. No, everything is done properly. God’s righteousness is the best foundation; there is absolute legal certainty.

This word is so compact and so rich in content in describing what has now been accomplished in the “last Adam” (Christ) that one can hardly grasp it.

One could say that grace now also reigns as death once did – overcoming every obstacle and irresistible. We can no more escape its consequences than the sinner can escape death. But this rule of grace we are glad to accept!

For the first time in this context eternal life is mentioned, and here what is meant is its future possession in the resurrection of life. Eternal life promises a future in Christ that has no end. The Letter to the Romans is proof of how God fights for us so that we do not perish but have eternal life.

3.11 Overview of Romans 5:12–21

		Representative and head of the old creation; the <i>first</i> man		Representative and head of the new creation; the <i>second</i> man and <i>last</i> Adam	
Type of Christ	Adam			Jesus	Christ
Act	Tresspass			(Act of) righteousness The perfect redemptive work of Jesus	
Result	Sin	and	death	Righteousness	and life

Effect	on	all	Sentence	and	Grace and justification of life
descendants			condemnation		
Standing before God		Sinners		Righteous	
Old and new claim to		Reign of sin to death		Reign of grace through	
the	throne			righteousness	to eternal life

4. Romans 6: Free from the Power of Sin

All human beings who are born belong “by nature” (Eph 2:3; Rom 11:24), whether they want to admit it or not, to the line of Adam, their forefather. As such they are inevitably infected with sin. The proof of this is unambiguous: They die, even without having transgressed a specific commandment. But God’s grace is unstoppable. He has sent a “new” Adam into the world, and he is God’s answer to the failure of the first Adam and of humanity as a whole. The “last Adam” is Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, who, unlike Adam, was obedient his whole life long under the most difficult conditions, up to the climax of voluntarily giving himself up as a sacrifice for sin. This act of righteousness (5:18) opens the door to the tree of life that was closed by Adam’s sin. This tree of life is now Christ himself, as the one who died and rose again. In him there now arises a generation of new people who, through God’s intervention (1 Cor 1:30), are transferred from Adam into Christ. A turning point of salvation takes place, a change of sides that cuts the connection with Adam and creates a new one with Christ. They are, as it were, cut out of Adam’s tree and have now grown together with Christ (6:5); they are now “in Christ Jesus” (6:11). They receive the life of the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45) and belong to a new family whose head, beginning, and origin is the man Jesus Christ. He is not the second Adam but the “*last*” Adam: There will be no new tragedy, no new fall, that could ever bring sin into this new creation.

4.1 Changing Sides: From Adam to Christ

How does Paul now carry this theme further? The second section of Romans 5 is a kind of groundwork for the three following chapters. Now it is about how this crossing over from one line to the other takes place. How is this change from death to life carried out? What happens to these people? What consequences does it have for the lives of such people? What happens to sin? Do believers now become sinless through conversion and new birth? These and similar questions lie behind Paul’s explanations in chapter 6.

4.2 Verses 1-2: Is Grace a License to Sin?

What shall we say then?

Should we continue in sin

so that grace may overflow?

By no means!

We who have died to (with respect to) sin,

how should we still live in it?

Evidently believers (and it is to such that Paul is speaking here) can still continue in sin, which already settles the question of whether a believer no longer has any sin. The overflowing abundance of grace, which on the basis of Christ's work will always surpass sin and its consequences, could be misunderstood, deliberately or unintentionally. People go on living as always, as if they still belonged to the Adam family, although they are already in Christ. That is, of course, beyond all question a false conclusion and a contradiction, which Paul firmly opposes. Nevertheless, there seem to have been such ideas (they were probably Judaizing arguments against Paul's gospel), and sadly some Christians live by this motto even today. Paul says that we have nothing to do with this conclusion. There is a compelling reason for this:

4.2.1 We Have Died to Sin and Its Power!

The believer is not to lead a life ruled by sin. What is the reason? He has died with respect to sin, which logically must have the consequence that sin can no longer rule his life. A dead person does not react to anything.

You have to read carefully: It is not sin that has died; *we* have died. But now I notice that I am still very much alive. How is this death to be explained?

We cannot yet take the explanation from this verse; it follows in the next verses. Here, by way of introduction, it is first of all about this fact as such: As far as sin is concerned, we have died.

Of course we already know that this death is the death of Jesus Christ, but let us follow Paul as he develops this thought step by step. This pointer is already important here: The death that we have died does not end our existence – neither that of the spirit or the soul nor that of the body. It is a “special” death; it relates only to sin. With regard to sin, in connection or in relation to

sin, we have died. It is about the death of Jesus, who took upon himself God's death sentence on sin. He died to sin (verse 10), because he offered himself as a sacrifice and was made sin for us.

4.3 Verses 3-4: Baptized into Christ and His Death

*Or do you not know
that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus
have been baptized into his death?
We were therefore buried with him
through baptism into death,
so that,
just as Christ was raised from the dead
through the glory of the Father,
we too might walk in newness of life.*

The Romans may have wondered how this “having died” was to be understood. That is why Paul reminds them of their baptism. They had been baptized into Christ Jesus. With this act they had (to continue the thread of Rom 5:12-21) carried out, as a public confession, the change of sides from Adam to Christ. By being baptized in a river or lake, they let everyone who saw it know that they had a new Lord. Although water is not mentioned here, this is about water baptism. Baptism itself has nothing to do with the inner reality of “having died.” Baptism as an outward act does not bring about my death, nor does it bring about my new birth. It is, so to speak, the outward side of a reality that has come about through faith and the new birth.¹² Baptism is a picture of what has happened to me spiritually, and therefore in reality, when I was united with Christ.

12. This is not baptism with the Holy Spirit. That is done by Christ. He is the one who baptizes, who gives the Holy Spirit to believers and thereby adds them to, or incorporates them into, the one body, the church (1 Cor 12:13). Water baptism is carried out by human beings: Christians, who are called disciples, perform baptism and thereby fulfill Jesus' missionary commission. Baptism of the Spirit also does not take place into death but is rather a sign of life. Water baptism is a public testimony, an outward act; baptism of the Spirit is an invisible, inward event that takes place once, with the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and in the sense of the NT relates only to belonging to the church.

4.3.1 Baptism into Death

We have been baptized not only into the name of Christ Jesus but also into his death. Baptism is a confession of, or into, the death of Christ. After all, the person being baptized turned to Christ precisely because Christ died as his substitute. Although we admire the perfect life of Jesus, and there is nothing comparable to it, it is nevertheless his death that saves us, not his holy life.

So in water baptism we confess Jesus Christ and his death. Both, incidentally, are foolishness to the world.

The “reference point of baptism” is the person of Jesus Christ *and* his death. The reference point of baptism indicates to which person one commits oneself through baptism (e.g., baptized into Moses; 1 Cor 10:2). From baptism onward one follows the person into whom one has been baptized.

The symbolism of baptism is clear: What is depicted in the act of baptism is not the process of killing. Baptism is not a “drowning.” Baptism is quite simply a symbolic burial, into a watery grave, so to speak. That means that a dead person is baptized (immersed). Our old self has been crucified with him (that is, put to death). So when in baptism I confess the death of Christ as my personal rescue from God’s death sentence, this includes my public acknowledgment that I deserved God’s death sentence. Through baptism I confess that in the substitutionary death of Jesus the death sentence was carried out on me. The old self that I was until my conversion and new birth is symbolically carried to the grave and buried in baptism. With it I confess that my life without Christ deserved nothing but death and at the same time has been ended forever. This life in the line and family tree of Adam has now come to an end.

The picture of a prairie fire explains the idea: To protect myself from such a wildfire, I can only flee to where the fire has already raged. In the same way, as one who confesses Christ, I step through baptism into the place where judgment has already taken place, namely into death.

It is said once more that this burial took place into death. What that includes Paul explains immediately when he describes the reality of faith. Already before baptism, through faith, a new state of affairs exists for the person concerned – even then, when he has not yet been baptized. Baptism is meant to bear witness to what is already an inner reality and what already happened 2,000 years ago.

But baptism does not only symbolize a spiritual fact. As a confession, it outwardly carries out my break with the line of Adam (and thus my separation from the world). Through the act of baptism the person being baptized separates himself from the world, so to speak. That does not produce an inner reality, since it is only a formal outward act. Baptism does not save for heaven, but it does “save” from the world. Through baptism a radical outward separation from the world takes place, which corresponds to the inner reality of faith of the believer being baptized. That is what Peter means when he says that we are saved through baptism (Acts 2:40; 1 Pet 3:21).

The emphasis that baptism includes the confession of a spiritual reality is necessary in view of a false ecclesiastical understanding of baptism that makes it a “sacrament” and thereby gives the impression that it is necessary for salvation. Paul, however, did not know this problem that Christendom made out of it. One has the impression that for him both sides (the outward side of confession and the inward side of genuine faith) were interwoven, in that they represent something that supports and even conditions each other. Paul would hardly have understood this separation between inward and outward aspects that we rightly emphasize. For him there were no unbaptized Christians (that is, no unbaptized children of God to whom the new birth had been granted) and no baptized non-Christians either.

No one would be baptized if the confession into death had been everything and death had the last word. Although baptism is a “burial,” it is at the same time a sign of hope, a proof of the new life. On the one hand it is the acknowledgment of God’s death sentence on me as a sinner, but it also documents the step into new life through the Risen One:

4.4 Verse 4: Raised to Newness of Life

*... just as Christ was raised from the dead
through the glory of the Father,
we too might walk in newness of life.*

Baptism speaks first of death, but then also of life. Our “having died” with Christ is followed by our union with him in his resurrection as well. Our connection with Christ is expressed in the fact that we are united with him (“grown together” in Rom 6:5 [cf. ER, German Bible translation]) in his whole

work – in his crucifixion, his burial, and his resurrection, and even in his ascension and enthronement (Eph 2:1-10) – even though the latter is not the subject here (see Eph 2).

The glory of the Father (a phrase that occurs only here) had to respond to this obedient surrender to death, a death that Christ died for others and not for himself. Of course it was also the glorious greatness of the Father and his power that raised him. But this translation is more precise. It was about the glory of the Father. In view of this unique and total self-giving it was, so to speak, “compelled” to raise his beloved Son. In salvation history, and above all in salvation itself, it is always about the glory of God. It must be preserved and remain untouched. Only then can there be an eternal and secure salvation.

We fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23); as natural human beings we can in no way measure up to this divine glory or ever be in agreement with it. But Christ did. He glorified the Father by doing his will, by seeking his honor, and finally by doing the work the Father had given him to carry out. It was the glory of the Father that raised him, because it could not remain silent while death reigned over him (6:9) and the Unique One, the Son of his love, was in the grave.

Now if we are united with him in this way, we also share in his resurrection. This is said here (if not literally, then indirectly). The old life of the old self is brought to an end. Now in the power of his resurrection we can possess a new life and act accordingly in everyday life. “Newness of life” means a completely different life in contrast to the previous one. We can lead a different life than before, because a new life has been granted to us. It differs from the one we had when we belonged to the Adam family. That is what Paul said earlier (“reign in life”; 5:17). The new life of the last Adam has raised us above death and above sin; it has set us free to serve. Serving God as those who “present themselves to him” (cf. 6:13) means reigning in life.

4.5 Verse 5: United with Him in His Death and His Resurrection

For if we have been united with him (grown together) in the likeness of his death, we shall also be so in the (likeness) of his resurrection ...

The way to a new life that pleases God leads only through death, which ends the old life. Only God himself can bring this about. It is not we who end it.

Rather, this is God's action and his deed alone. Only one who has died and been buried can rise to newness of life. That too is God's deed, which is credited to me through faith in Christ.

Paul confirms that our connection with Christ means not only our death but also our resurrection. On the one hand, the history of the old self is brought to an end in accordance with God's will and his holy and righteous nature; that is, the righteous demands of his holiness are met in judgment. That, and nothing else, is the only basis for a new beginning that accords with God. The connection with Christ is very close – indeed, as if we had grown together. What is meant here is not a process that unites us more intimately with Christ step by step, but a single and completed event. It is not about spiritual growth, which I have some influence on, but about a “final act” that God guarantees. It took place outside of me and *for me* (not in me) 2,000 years ago in the historical¹³ death of Jesus at Golgotha.

His resurrection is our resurrection. Paul does not understand this resurrection as our future resurrection.¹⁴ We have died spiritually – not in the literal or physical sense. The meaning of resurrection, then, also relates to our new spiritual life, which we have received in the Risen One. Paul says, “Then we shall (certainly, quite definitely) also be so in his resurrection.”¹⁵ That agrees completely with what Paul tells the Colossians: “... buried with him in baptism, in him also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God” (Col 2:12; ER, German Bible translation).

Newness of life (verse 4) is nothing other than having been raised with Christ. We are alive from the dead (cf. the wording that follows shortly afterward in verse 13).

4.6 Verse 6: The Old Self Crucified with Him

... *knowing this*,

13. “Historical” here means the actual, historically attested death of Jesus on the cross.

14. Some commentators think that in this chapter raising or resurrection always concerns the body. They rightly stress that the old self is buried and does not rise again. But baptism brings me into connection with a Christ who died but also rose again. This baptism is quite deliberately carried out in water. That the person being baptized comes up out of the water again after being immersed makes clear, as a testimony, that he is entering a new life under the leadership of the Risen One.

15. After all, not all believers have to go through physical death, because some will be transformed and caught up before they die. These too will already share in the resurrection described here (the life-changing resurrection in the spiritual sense).

*that our old self was crucified with him,
so that the body of sin might be done away with (rendered powerless),
so that we no longer serve sin (as slaves).*

In this sentence Paul now gets to the heart of the matter. This is the explanation of what he said at the beginning of the chapter: “We have died to sin.”

Our old self was judged by God in Christ on the cross; God’s righteous death sentence was carried out. He, our Lord, took this judgment of God upon himself in our place. God put the old self on trial at the cross. The old self did not simply die of old age; it is about a legal trial against what the old self is and has done. The result of this trial was the uncompromising execution of the death sentence.

The crux of our Christian life is that this is about something that we “know” or “recognize.” Here something happened outside of me, as a substitute for me. I had my representative at this judgment, Christ, who stood in front of me so that it struck not me but him. What happened there is something I cannot feel or sense. This work of Jesus for me is 100% valid – regardless of my feelings and sensations.

The goal of what happened at Golgotha is to break the power of sin that rules over human beings, and to do so in the life of every believer.

4.6.1 The Old Self

Among Christians this term is used in various ways, for example as the *old nature* that is still alive in the Christian. In the context of Romans 6 it can only mean the human being, or the kind of human being, that belongs to Adam. The old self (Gk. *palaios anthropos*) is the person before his conversion, before his new birth. The old self cannot be equated with the “flesh” or with the old nature or with sin. It is the human being who stands in the line of Adam, that is, belongs to the Adam family and is determined by sin. As such he is lost. And this sinful human being met his end on the cross. That is why the following is important: We no longer carry the old self around with us. But the flesh, our old nature, is still in us as long as we live in the earthly existence of our body.

The expression “*our* old self” makes the matter very personal for everyone it concerns. It is *my* old life, which shaped me as a responsible human being

before my conversion and which I lived accordingly.

The “old self” is mentioned in two other passages, and only by Paul. This is a term that he probably coined himself. It did not exist – neither in the OT nor in the thought world of the Greeks. In this form and with this meaning it occurs exclusively in the NT. In these passages (Eph 4:20-24; Col 3:9-10) it says that we have put off the old self (like a garment). All three passages describe a completed action that took place once.

Nevertheless, these verses also underline that we are to put off the old way of life of the old self in practice as well. The once-for-all putting off of the old self is followed by the continual renewal of the “new self,” which, so to speak, crowds out the “old self” more and more.

The existence of this old self describes the human being who is ruled by sin. He has let his mind, his will, and his soul (simply everything that makes up this person) be shaped by sin. This need not have shown itself in obvious sins; it simply appeared in a self-determined life separated from God, which may even have had a religious veneer.

In Romans 6, unlike in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, Paul does not speak explicitly of the “new self” that has taken the place of the old. But he means the same thing when he speaks of the “newness of life” that now marks us.

In other words, Paul expresses the same thing like this: “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:19-20). Here the old self is equated with the “I” that stands for the person of Paul. It is his “old I,” his old life before his conversion, his old self, which has now been replaced by a new I, namely by Christ himself.

4.6.2 The Crucifixion of the Old Self

Our old life comprised what we did and what we were (and what every human being without God is). It could be ended only by death. This happened as a substitute for us and outside of us 2,000 years ago at Golgotha in the historically attested death of Jesus. Jesus Christ voluntarily made himself available for it. The judgment struck him. William Kelly aptly describes what happened: “He who had fulfilled the law and was the heir of the promise chose the curse instead of the crown, took upon himself the judgment of God

instead of the kingdom of God. Then the most wonderful of all acts was carried out: the pouring out of everything that God felt against sin and could express, upon the head of him who knew no sin. All that God in holy indignation could do against evil came upon him who had never done any evil and in whose mouth no deceit was found. He who was his own Son, the object of his perfect delight, of his absolute and eternal favor, was given up to unsparing judgment. God himself dealt with him as he had never dealt with anyone before, nor will ever deal with anyone else again.”¹⁶

4.6.3 The Body of Sin

The result of the crucifixion of my old self is that the body of sin has been done away with (or, better, has been rendered *powerless*). What is meant by “body of sin”? Is it just another term for, or another aspect of, the expression “old self,” or is the sinful “flesh” being addressed?

The body of sin is our physical body as it has let itself be used, with its members, as an instrument of unrighteousness. The old self expressed and manifested itself through the body. Through its drives and desires the body put itself at the center of the old life. The body developed sinful habits, enforced them, and raised them to the law of life. Elsewhere Paul names the “elements of human existence” by putting the spirit first and the body last. This order has been reversed. The body has stepped into first place as the determining element, followed only then by the soul and finally by the spirit, which ought to characterize and determine human existence as such (1 Thess 5:23).

Of course the body is not sinful in itself, but it was subject to sin and a willing platform for sin. The body developed a sinful life of its own. It is anything but neutral. When Paul says that he beats his body and brings it into bondage (1 Cor 9:27), with the old self the opposite is the case. Through its desires the body brings the person into bondage. So the body belongs to sin; it has become the *body of sin*. That is exactly why we are now to present our members to God (Rom 6:13, 19). Yes, we are even called to consecrate the body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1).

The body was not crucified. Rather, the old self was crucified, so that from now on the body is no longer the instrument of sin. This body is now

16. William Kelly, *Die Lehre des NT über den Heiligen Geist*, p. 191.

powerless (with regard to the fact that it must sin) – like a paralyzed person who can no longer move freely. So a divine full stop was put at Golgotha to the free development of sin; sin is no longer to reign in our mortal body (the body of sin and death; 7:24; 8:10) (6:12). In this sense the physical body is no longer an instrument for sin, because from now on it is at the disposal of God and of righteousness. This is explained more fully and concretely in the second part of Romans 6 as a consequence of liberation from sin. With regard to sin, the body has served its time. How that happens Paul describes in what follows. We – as those alive from the dead – are now to place the individual members of the body at God’s disposal (6:11-13, 19). And as far as sin is concerned, we are to reckon ourselves dead to it and on this basis put to death the deeds of the body (8:13), which will be our subject later.

4.7 Verse 7: Acquitted from Sin

*For one who has died
has been acquitted (justified, or set free)
from sin.*

There is – seen legally or juridically – no longer any connection between me and sin. It can no longer be charged to me as guilt; I can no longer be accused on account of sin. Even if it is still in me, it is an “isolated foreign body” that has nothing to do with me and my new existence, in which I am forever united with Christ. That is how radical the effect of his death for us, and of our death with him, is. This is proclaimed symbolically through baptism; we are now on the other side of the “watery grave.”

This statement must be viewed first, if not exclusively, in legal terms. This statement is not about our sanctification, for there even we ourselves often have contradictory experiences, or we see Christians who lead a fleshly or sinful life. It is about justification (acquittal) from sin. This acquittal does not become valid only with physical death; rather, it indeed describes the new legal status of the believer. “Sin no longer has the legal right to enforce its reign and to control the believer, for he has died with Christ.”¹⁷

It is absolutely important not to look here yet for final explanations of how we can lead a victorious Christian life. Even though this verse is the reason why

17. John A. Witmer, *The Bible Knowledge Bible Commentary*, Walvoord & Zuck (eds.), p. 463, Victor Books, 1988.

we no longer serve sin as slaves (verse 6), Paul has not yet reached the end of his teaching about what man was in Adam and what had to happen to transfer us from there into Christ. He speaks about a victorious Christian life in chapter 8, after he has worked out the theme comprehensively. Later he speaks about the power for living through the Holy Spirit and about what happens in us. In other words, once we have arrived here, we absolutely must continue our mountain hike. If everything regarding a victorious life were already settled here, there would be no need for chapters 7 and 8.

That this is about a legal state of affairs that was created outside of me 2,000 years ago becomes clear from the fact that sin still occurs in my practical life. *Legally* means that I can no longer be accused on account of sin and that it no longer has any right to rule me. And if that is my legal status, then it is the standing of the righteous (5:19), into which God has placed me and which for him is the only valid standing I occupy. There is no other standing anymore – I am not righteous on one occasion and a sinner on another, or both at the same time. That contradicts itself and, above all, God’s great salvation.

The comparison already used helps to make this clear. On December 18, 1865, the law abolishing slavery came into force in the USA. It affected every slave. Legally, all slaves were free from that day on, even though they had not been present when this law was signed. This happened without their doing anything and in another place, and yet it was fully valid. Now they only had to hear about it, claim it for themselves, and leave their masters.

4.8 Verses 8-9: Sharing Death and Life with Christ

*But if we have died with Christ,
we believe
that we will also live with him,
knowing
that Christ, having been raised from the dead,
dies no more;
death no longer reigns over him.*

For the second time Paul draws the conclusion from the fact that we are united with Christ. In verse 4 the consequence of Jesus’ resurrection was that we, as those “raised with him,” walk in newness of life. In verse 5 Paul confirms the

significance of Jesus' resurrection for us, not only with regard to the future, but with regard to our life here and now. In verse 8 it is again about the resurrection, but now about the future and bodily resurrection. As one raised from the dead, the man Jesus Christ can no longer die; his resurrection life is indestructible. United with him, we have the same life. In Adam we inherited death, in Christ life. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have been able to leave the realm, or kingdom, of death (that sphere in which people are still "in Adam").

Death reigned over Jesus when he was in the grave. A truly extraordinary statement. Jesus humbled himself to the point of death on the cross and voluntarily suffered death; he, who is life itself, even had to give himself up to death. Then for a short time death was victor over him. But the glory of the Father could do nothing other than raise the Unique and Perfect One to a new life.

What applies to Christ also applies to us. The reign of death is broken, even though, as it says a few verses later, we have mortal bodies. That is why our resurrection is also included in the victory over death, when the bodies that have died and decayed are snatched from the reign of death.

4.9 Verse 10: Christ, Who Died to Sin

*For the death he died,
he died to sin once for all;
but the life he lives,
he lives to God.*

If we want to understand what it means for us to have died to sin, then we must understand what it meant for Christ that he died to sin. He died as a sacrifice for sin by enduring the sentence of condemnation on our old self.

So through death he solved the problem of sin: on the one hand he paid the debt of sin, but at the same time he also broke the power of sin and left it behind him. The new resurrection life is no longer under the power of sin and death; rather, it is a life led by God and for God and consecrated to him alone.

A second solution to the problem of sin is no longer required. A second sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary, as the Letter to the Hebrews clearly confirms.

“If the wages of sin is death, what a gain for us is the death of him who personally was without sin, who was made sin for us by God, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Not that on the cross he was not as holy as in everything that went before; but he gave himself up to be rightfully condemned for everything that was laid to his charge, for which in grace he took responsibility. In nothing did he spare himself; in nothing did God spare him, who forsook the one who had identified himself with our sin and all its consequences under divine judgment, so that we could go free.”¹⁸

This uniqueness of the sacrifice, and the clear position that results from it – the change of sides that has been carried out – also apply to us. And that is a truth of which we can and should be certain forever. Recognizing and accepting this truth decides our freedom, in which we may serve God.

4.10 Verse 11: Reckoning Oneself Dead to Sin but Alive to God

*So you also,
consider
that you are dead to sin,
but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

How do we relate to the truth that Paul has just unfolded? We are to accept it as a fact that is reliable and valid for us. “Considering” also means “reckoning” oneself as such. This is a term from bookkeeping: The balance sheet is drawn up and closed. The result is that the work of Christ is credited one hundred percent to my personal account. His death is my death; his life is my life.

This verse is *not*, as is often said, the key to the fight against sin. When the temptation to sin comes to me, I cannot constantly tell myself that I am dead. After all, I notice that I am not dead at all; otherwise I would not react to the temptation in the first place. What is to be done in temptation Paul describes in chapter 8.

So here it is first about trusting acceptance of God’s saving act for me, not about putting this fact into practice day by day. I do not need to put it into practice, because it has already happened. Paul does not say that we are to die to sin daily or play dead when temptation comes. Rather, he explains that we *have*

18. William Kelly, *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 88.

died. That has an effect on my life, because it means that the power of sin over my life is broken.

Whoever reckons himself dead to sin accepts in faith that his old life was ended on the cross and that the reign of sin in his life is therefore broken. On this basis of salvation I claim, just as much in faith, the fact of salvation that I now have a new life with which I can live for God as one set free. Watchman Nee aptly says, “Knowing – reckoning – presenting oneself: that is the sequence according to divine order.”¹⁹

4.11 Verse 12: Sin's Reign over the Body Is Broken

*Therefore let sin not reign
in your mortal body,
to obey its desires.*

This is the consequence of what happened on the cross. This is the goal of Golgotha: The dictatorship of sin, whether in its barely perceptible manipulation or in the most brutal exercise of power, is broken. The work of Jesus has the power to break the actual power of sin in my life. It is to this work that we appeal. That is what it means to reckon oneself dead to sin!

Our mortal body (like the immaterial part of man, that is, the inner self) is subject to the consequences of sin. The body is the instrument through which sin gets hands and feet. Sin itself is still in me (namely in my flesh; cf. 7:18), but it no longer has the right to rule over me (6:6b, 14). The body is so affected by sin that it is led astray by sins, by desires and lusts that constantly demand satisfaction.

Paul emphasizes the legal aspect of salvation, which is always valid for every believer. But this does not remain a theoretical or abstract matter. The legal aspect of salvation serves as the basis on which my daily life is no longer ruled by sin.

4.12 Verse 13: Presenting Oneself to God Now

*And do not present your members to sin
as instruments of unrighteousness,
but present yourselves to God*

19. Watchman Nee, *Das normale Christenleben* (The Normal Christian Life), p. 58.

*as those alive from the dead,
and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.*

Now we are called to do something. Up to this point there was no exhortation except that of accepting God's work and appealing to it (6:11). Now the putting into practice follows from it. To present the members of the body means to place oneself at someone's disposal. My hands and feet, my eyes and ears, and my mouth (simply my whole human existence with all its senses and abilities) are now to fulfill their purpose. "Becoming what we are"²⁰ – that is not a contradiction, but the secret and also the tension of a victorious life. We are alive from the dead, because in Christ Jesus we have the life of the Risen One. This life of the Victor is consecrated to God, no longer to unrighteousness.

4.13 Verse 14: Not under Law, but under Grace

*For sin will not reign over you,
for you are not under law,
but under grace.*

It is a fact that sin no longer reigns over us. That state is a thing of the past. We look ahead; we step into life. It is not determined by God's law, strange as that sounds. The law, Paul had explained, was a means through which sin overflowed. But now our life is determined by the grace of God. The law rightly makes demands but gives no power to obey. The grace in which we stand gives us what we need to live for God. It is a totally different atmosphere of life. The grace of God gives in abundance; the law demands. A Christian who makes friends with the law will experience what is described in Romans 7: inability and frustration. We needed the grace of God for salvation, and in the same way we need the grace of God for living. We live under the protection, in the acceptance, and in the power of God's grace. Being under grace is synonymous with the fact of being "in Christ," as it is discussed in chapter 8.

"When I am no longer under law but under grace, I can finally do as I please – as Christ pleases!"²¹

Paul touches on the law only briefly here, but in this one sentence he says everything that is decisive about it, and he works this out further in chapter 7.

20. F. Godet.

21. Hans-Joachim Eckstein.

Perhaps hearers or readers of this chapter immediately thought of the law as a suitable measure by which the reign of sin could be broken.

4.14 Summary

The change of sides from Adam to Christ is carried out through the cross. My past, that is, my old self, is condemned and judged as God wills. Jesus Christ took that upon himself in my place. In him my new life now begins. The claim that sin made on my life was extinguished on the cross; its power over me was broken there.

Up to this point, this text is not primarily about the extent to which we now lead a holy or sinless life. The believer still has sin, which remains in him as long as he is in the body. Sadly, a Christian's life can be marked by the sinful flesh, in complete contradiction to what Paul writes here. That is not what this passage (Rom 6:1-14) is about! Paul explains the radical and fundamental change from Adam to Christ, from sin to righteousness, from death to life.

Christians who have forgotten this, or who try to reckon themselves dead to sin by their own efforts or to die to it, should claim this text for themselves literally, in all its absoluteness.

To Christians who love sin, the description of their real position, the position they hold in their standing, is meant to make clear that they are living in a great contradiction. It is paradoxical to live in sin although one has died to sin.

The death that we have died – with Christ – does not mean our extinction. In the biblical sense death (both spiritual and physical) means the separation of things that belong together. Through the death of the old self, sin is separated from me and the connection is cut, so that the power of sin is broken.

4.15 The Cross of Golgotha and Sin

It has happened for us!

Romans 1 – 5:11: Atonement

The problem of sins
The sinful deeds and the question of guilt

Romans 5:12 – 8:13: Liberation

The problem of sin
Sin as the source of sins

Through the blood of Jesus Christ shed We have been crucified with Christ.
on the cross we have forgiveness of sins. Our old self was given over to death.

Christ died for Christ died for sin and for our sinful nature, which by our sins. nature marked our old self.

4.16 Romans 6:15–23: Freed People Who Live under Grace

In the second part of this chapter Paul underlines (drawing conclusions from what he described in the first part about God's saving action) that one can serve only one master and not two masters at the same time.

4.17 The Indicative and the Imperative of Salvation

What reads as complicated is in reality a helpful formulation. It is about the two sides of one and the same coin. "Indicative" and "imperative" are two terms that come from grammar. Theologians use them in connection with the term "salvation" in order to sum up what "the two sides or aspects of salvation" are. The indicative of salvation shows what Christ has accomplished for us, that is, the objective reality of salvation. This aspect comprises the inviolable salvation that God has actually granted to every believer and that is valid for him.

Out of salvation comes a changed and new life. Salvation obligates us to a life and conduct in newness. This is the imperative of salvation, the divine call to a holy life. The grace received in salvation trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live righteously and godly lives (cf. Titus 2:12). You do not receive salvation without also receiving the moral obligation of God's salvation. Whoever does not take the imperative of salvation seriously must examine himself as to whether he may claim salvation for himself.

The indicative stands for something that has actually happened and thus describes the reality of salvation. The imperative of salvation is the command and the encouragement to live a holy life. Both are part of salvation. In Romans 6, too, the two aspects can be clearly recognized. Verses 1 to 10 describe the indicative of salvation, while from verse 11 onward the imperative of salvation is dealt with.

The imperative of salvation does not call us to earn salvation, but to live out of the salvation we have received. Its proving ground lies under the reign of grace, where there is forgiveness and generous restoration. Salvation is not given in order to sort out the strong and filter out those who will not make it. All the imperatives of salvation aim at our truly obeying God in faith, and they do not mean that faith can fail. Although our salvation is secure and cannot be

lost, the admonitions and warnings to live accordingly do not contradict this fact. Rather, they are meant to “keep us on track” – on the narrow path of faith that leads to life.

Overview²²

**Fact of salvation – indicative of Appropriation of salvation –
salvation imperative of salvation**

Gift: given through Christ

Task: for Christ

What we already *are* in Christ ... we can only *become* in Christ.

We have died to sin. Rom 6:2 Do not give yourselves over to sin!
Rom 6:13

We have died with Christ. Col 3:3 Put to death your members! Col 3:5;
Rom 8:13

We are justified ... Rom 5:1 ... and are to live righteously. 1 Tim
6:11

We are no longer in the flesh. Rom 8:9 No longer live according to the flesh!
Rom 8:12

We have been sanctified once for all through the sacrifice of Christ! Heb 10:10 Pursue the holiness without which no
one will see the Lord! Heb 12:14

We are called. Eph 4:1; Rom 8:28 Walk worthy of your calling! Eph 4:1

Everything has been given to us ... therefore we are to appropriate everything.

We have put on the new self, that is, Put on the Lord Jesus Christ! Rom
Christ. Col 3:10, 11; Eph 4:24 13:14

We have complete forgiveness. Eph 1:7 We are obligated to forgive one
another! Eph 4:32

God has given us his love. Rom 5:5 Walk in love! Eph 5:1, 2

We have peace with God and the peace of God. Rom 5:1; Phil 4:7 Pursue peace! 1 Pet 3:11

We have freedom in Christ. Rom 8:2; Gal 5:1 Therefore remain in freedom, in order
Gal 5:1 to serve one another in love! Gal 5:13

22. Based on Peter H. Uhlmann, Heimenhausen, Switzerland, used by kind permission.

God gives us victory. 1 Cor 15:57 We appropriate the victory when we fight. 2 Tim 2:5 and elsewhere

We are light in the Lord. Eph 5:8a Walk as children of light, or: Let your light shine! Eph 5:8b; Matt 5:16

We experience the new order of ... and await the new creation.
salvation ...

Christ is our life. Col 3:4; Gal 2:20 We await the revelation of Christ.
Col 3:4

In Christ we are redeemed ... Eph 1:7 ... and await the redemption of our body. Rom 8:23

We have been adopted by God as his children and sons ... Rom 8:15; 1 John 3:2 ... and wait for this to become visible. Rom 8:23; 1 John 3:2

The new self is created after the image We are being transformed (in our of the one who created it: Christ. Eph lives) into the Lord's image. 2 Cor 4:24 3:18

We have eternal life ... John 3:36 ... and yet: Take hold of eternal life!
1 Tim 6:12

As the church we are one body. Eph 4:4 Therefore preserve the unity of the Spirit. Eph 4:3

We are already complete in Christ ... but not yet made perfect. Phil Col 2:10 3:12

God works everything – 100%! Appropriate everything – 100%!

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.” Phil 2:12

Already **Not** **yet**

Being – our standing in faith *Becoming* – faith put into practice

The sovereignty and grace of The responsibility and action of the God Christian

We are already completely saved – but not yet made perfect!

Both sides lead into this commission: *Become what you are!*

“Every battery has a negative and a positive pole. This opposition is the precondition for there being a voltage. Only then can the current flow so that the light shines. In exactly the same way, we are living (and growing) Christians only when we are aware of the two ‘poles’ of the fact of salvation and the appropriation of salvation and put salvation into practice in our lives. This tension gives us the dynamic of the new life.”²³

4.18 Verse 15: The Goal of Grace

*What then, should we sin
because we are not under law
but under grace?
Far from it!*

Once again someone could draw the wrong conclusion from what Paul taught. So the life of a Christian is now under grace, no longer under the law. Does this mean that you can take advantage of this freedom and live without restraint? Absolutely not; that would again be an absurd conclusion. For you would be overlooking the following:

4.19 Verse 16: Slaves of Sin or of Righteousness

*Do you not know that
to whom you present yourselves as slaves for obedience,
you are the slaves of the one you obey:
either of sin leading to death
or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

Whoever takes grace and freedom from the law as permission to sin forgets that in doing so he hands himself over to sin and makes it his ruler again. There is no happy medium on which you can honor both masters without conflict. There are only two kinds of dependence – either a life determined by sin or a walk in obedience to God.

4.20 Verse 17: Obedient from the Heart – No Longer Slaves of Sin

But thanks be to God

23. Quotation from Peter Uhlmann, Heimenhausen, Switzerland, used by kind permission.

*that you were slaves of sin
but have become obedient from the heart
to the pattern of teaching
to which you were handed over!*

Paul is not putting the Romans to the test, and he does not doubt their salvation. He does not ask them whose slaves they are now; rather, he states without any doubt that their slavery shaped by sin is a thing of the past. He rejoices and thanks God. In Romans 5:8 he had already said that we *were* once sinners, so we are no longer. He confirms that here once more. Even if, sadly, we still sin now, we are no longer in bondage to sin.

This “transfer” was God’s work. He moved us out of the realm of death and granted us life. The realm of life is impressively described to us through the “pattern of teaching” in these chapters. It is extraordinarily important to know this teaching of God about salvation in Christ. The teaching forms the foundation on which you first have to understand the principles of newness of life in order then to be able to live accordingly. The teaching does not arise from our experience; rather, it sets the course. By it we measure and test our experience. The teaching of Holy Scripture corrects us, not the other way around.

The “pattern of teaching” is an indication that this teaching is not some kind of law book full of abstract clauses. It is “wisdom for living” and as such wants to change our lives. That is why the apostle puts it this way: We have been “handed over ... to the pattern of teaching” – namely for the purpose that it should bring about something in us.

There are many scholarly teachings and theories by specialists for specialists. God’s teaching applies to every child of God – no matter what background the love of God has brought him out of. This teaching is close to life and vital for life. These chapters, which are certainly not always easy to understand, are not the private territory of theologians; they contain existential questions of our Christian life. Much depends on whether we have understood them. You can lose years if you have not answered them for yourself personally.

God has handed us over to the pattern of teaching; yet at the same time our obedience to the gospel was the prerequisite for God’s action. The obedience took place “from the heart.” It was a step of obedience that came from deep within. It was not superficial obedience, but a genuine and lasting decision for

life. God wants our heart; he wants obedience to come from full conviction and joy. Everything else is worthless to God and amounts to nothing but outward form and hypocrisy.

4.21 Verse 18: Slaves of Righteousness

*But having been set free from sin,
you have become slaves of righteousness.*

This “divine transfer” from Adam to Christ has set us free from sin. Paul explained that in the first part of chapter 6.

Being set free does not mean the “removal” of sin, like the removal of a malignant tumor, for instance. Using this picture, Paul’s statement can be explained like this: The tumor has been treated with a laser, for sin has been judged on the cross; it was condemned in the flesh (8:3). But at the same time the body of sin was also rendered ineffective; that is, this tumor no longer has a body (no field of activity) in which it can spread. I am no longer described as sick, although the tumor is still there. Its growth has been contained. In other words: Sin is still in me (in my flesh, in my fleshly nature) as long as I am in my mortal body. Nevertheless, I am no longer a sinner by nature because of it, but a saint in Christ.

We have been set free from the *reign* of sin; we are no longer slaves of sin. On the contrary: We have now become slaves of God’s righteousness.

4.22 Verse 19: Placing Oneself at the Disposal of God's Righteousness and Holiness

*I am speaking in human terms
because of the weakness of your flesh.
For just as you presented your members
as slaves to impurity
and to lawlessness
leading to lawlessness,
so now present your members as slaves
to righteousness
leading to holiness.*

Paul's instruction is so "human" that you can hardly misunderstand him. He takes into account the weakness of their flesh. This term refers to a weak spiritual condition. The recipients of the letter were not able to understand the way of expressing things that Paul would normally have chosen for this instruction. Their spiritual condition was inadequate and needed growth and renewal, as Paul writes later. Doesn't that benefit us too?

What follows is an appeal, an imperative of salvation, to place oneself at the disposal of righteousness as slaves, so that "newness of life" can really come into its own.

The goal of "holiness" or "sanctification" refers to our fundamental change of position, which has made us saints, that is, people set apart for God. On the other hand, for those who have been justified and sanctified there is an obligation arising from salvation to live in consistent alignment with God's righteousness and holiness.

4.23 Verses 20-22: From Fruitlessness to Eternal Life

*For when you were slaves of sin,
you were free from righteousness.
What fruit did you have then
from the things of which you are now ashamed?
For their end is death.
But now, having been set free from sin
and having become slaves to God,
you have your fruit leading to holiness,
and as the end, eternal life.*

It is indeed a black-and-white picture that Paul paints here. For before their new birth, their change of position, the addressees had nothing to do with divine righteousness, but were slaves of sin. It was not as though there had previously been a mixture of both – just as little as there is now a mixture of both for them as Christians. The Lord Jesus said about this that you cannot serve two masters, but only one master.

Now the recipients of the letter were to look back. Sin had not just been an abstract companion in their lives; it had taken its toll and had led to deeds and

things of which they are now ashamed. Such a life leads to death. There is no other option than the one described in the next verse.

Being set free from sin and its power, together with the genuine freedom now to serve God as slaves, involves a new identity, a new position. It now produces things of which you no longer need to be ashamed, but which bring about fruit leading to holiness in the lives of those concerned. Newness of life produces fruit for God and has eternal life as its goal. You do not earn this life by bearing fruit for God. Rather, it belongs as a fixed component of God's salvation, as the following verse shows.

Eternal life here means the life of those raised in Christ, which we will attain in the future. At the end of a life for God there is not a period but a colon: An unimaginably glorious life in undisturbed fellowship with God awaits us. Eternal life means imperishability. From the NT, and especially from the apostle John, we also learn that this life does not only involve "length" or "quantity," but above all includes the "quality" of this divine life.

The goal of a life for God is eternal life. That is what we have in view, and we boast in the hope of the coming glory of God.

4.24 Verse 23: Eternal Life instead of Eternal Condemnation

*For the wages of sin is death,
but the free gift of God is eternal life
in Christ Jesus
our Lord.*

This word compresses into one sentence not only the content of Romans 6 but the whole gospel. The first human being "treated himself" to sin. For that he has to pay. Or the other way around: He is paid out for a performance that was not good but bad. This "deal," however, is irreversible. You cannot give death back or exchange it.

Wages or pay are something you have earned. God's answer, by contrast, is different. From him comes the free gift, an undeserved present. His answer to death is life. But it is not simply the reversal of death, as with Lazarus, whom Jesus raised. For Lazarus died again at some point after he was raised. God's gift, on the other hand, is a completely new life, because it is obtained in Christ

Jesus. The life of Christ is the life of one who has risen; it is a resurrection life beyond and unreachably far removed from the sphere of death's influence.

This life is eternal because it is God's own life. It could become our life because this life is "in the Son," who became man (1 John 5:11-13).

Christ Jesus, God's Anointed One, is not far away from us. He is our personal Lord, who stands in a close relationship with us. He is now our Master; he is our God.

5. The Law in the Letter to the Romans

The word law occurs 72 times in the Letter to the Romans. Altogether Paul uses the word 119 times in the NT. It is not always the Mosaic law, as can be seen from the context in each case. The Mosaic law is one of the great themes of the Letter to the Romans. This overview can help us understand the various meanings better.

Term	Meaning	References
		2:12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 23, 25
		3:19, 20, 21, 31
Law (with and without the article), under law, the will of God, the embodiment of the truth, requirements of the law, commandment, law of God, God's law, law of righteousness	In general it is always the law of Moses. In the Letter to the Romans the moral part of the law is meant, hardly or not at all the regulations for sacrifices, that is, the ritual laws. This part of the law was given only to the Jews.	4:13, 14, 15, 16 5:13, 20 6:14, 15 7:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 21, 22, 25 9:4, 31; 8:3, 4, 7 10:4, 5; 13:8, 10
“What is written (others translate: in the oldness of the letter , namely in the written [law]”)	The written law, the two tablets, also the five books of Moses	2:27, 29 7:6
Law of faith	The principle of faith and trust as opposed to works and righteousness by works	3:27, 28
A law to oneself ; work of the law written on the heart;		

conscience The moral part of the law, which corresponds to God's eternal nature and requirements (love; 13:10). Some Gentiles knew this law without knowledge of the Mosaic 2:14, commandments. Whenever a Gentile by nature obeys the 15 law of love, he does it, but he also sins against it again and again.

Law of the husband The law that concerns the husband (that is, the Mosaic law 7:2, that binds the wife to the husband) 3

Law of my mind The working and principle of the new life that wants to serve God. It is a natural law of the new life to serve God, 7:23 because the law of God is anchored in the new life.

Law of sin and death Indissoluble principle according to which sin dominates the human being as a matter of law and sin leads to death 7:23 without any way out 8:2

Law of the Spirit of life In Christ, the conqueror of death, the risen one, the law (principle, law of power) of the Holy Spirit of life is at work; it is stronger than that of sin and death. 8:2 Comparison: The natural law of gravity can be overcome only by another law, that of aerodynamics.

6. Romans 7: Free from the Law

In the thematic development of chapters 5 and 6 there is a noticeable intensification that continues up to chapter 7, verse 6. But then, in the second part of chapter 7, we come upon a gloomy situation that does not seem to fit the line of thought at all.

Chapter 7 is a digression²⁴ in which Paul deals with our relationship to the law, its effect, and its goal. He had already mentioned the Mosaic law, the Torah, twice in Romans 6:14-15, but with surprising consequences: It is no longer authoritative for the life of the Christian (whether Jew or Gentile). The Christian stands under grace, no longer under law. In just one sentence he states a fundamental fact with far-reaching implications. For the Gentile this was perhaps easy to accept, but for a Jew? For him it was a provocation, if not even blasphemy. Anticipating such reactions, Paul does not want to leave any question marks here and therefore takes up this subject in a whole chapter – one long parenthesis.²⁵

If Romans 6:23 were followed directly by 8:1, that is, if there were no chapter 7, then we (as Christians from the nations) would probably not have missed anything. And yet the teaching of Romans 7 is indispensable in the overall context of this subject. The great guiding line of Romans 5 to 8 can be summarized like this:

From Adam to Christ, from a fruitless life to a life that bears fruit for God and is no longer subject to sin. How did God do that, and how am I able today actually to walk in “newness of life”? Now the question presses itself upon us whether the law is really not necessary for this, as was already said in chapter 6. After all, it was given by God himself to show how one should live.

24. I regard the whole of chapter 7 as a parenthesis up to 8:1. For verses 1-6 do not belong thematically to chapter 6, but form the introduction to the parenthesis.

25. Incidentally, Paul does the same thing out of consideration for the Jews in chapters 9 – 11 as well. He explains why, on the one hand, the gospel applies not to the Jews alone but to all people. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that all the promises to the covenant people will be fulfilled in the future.

6.1 The Meaning and Place of Romans 7

This chapter of the Letter to the Romans has been understood in controversial ways. The burning question is which condition of a person this chapter describes. The best-known explanations are these:

- the normal condition of a Christian
- an abnormal and unwanted exceptional condition
- the condition of a person who has not been born again
- the condition of a born-again person who does not have the Holy Spirit.

The interpretation does indeed concern an existential issue for our Christian life. For much is at stake: Can the gospel really and lastingly change people? Or are we just fooling ourselves? From chapter 7 one could also draw the conclusion that it will mostly remain only an attempt to do good. Is the realist right who claims that victory over sin comes only in heaven? So how should Romans 7 be understood?

6.2 A Struggle of Spirit against Flesh?

Chapter 7 does *not* describe the constant conflict of a Christian in which the flesh and the Spirit rise up against each other and wrestle with each other, as described in Galatians 5:16-25. For there it is about victory in the power of the Holy Spirit, which can be seen nowhere in Romans 7. In the experience described here you see only frustration. The person groans under the power of sin. He looks only at himself and seeks strength exclusively within himself. Victory was actually already described in Romans 6. But what kind of victory is it if it looks like what chapter 7 describes? Romans 7 does not describe the normal Christian life, but the pitiable condition of a Christian who has made the law his rule of life and tries to keep it in his own strength. He does not believe what 6:14-15 says: We are no longer under law. That is why he has the bitter experience of not managing it. This brings him to the brink of despair (“Wretched man that I am,” verse 24).

6.3 Righteous and Sinners at the Same Time?

Martin Luther said that we are “righteous and sinners at the same time.”²⁶ It is precisely in Romans 7, according to Luther, that being a sinner comes to the fore. But we already saw in chapter 5 that we are no longer “sinners,” but were (5:8; 5:19). That is what God’s Word says. Romans 7 does not say that we are still sinners as regards our standing. Rather, this chapter expresses that God’s law is not the standard for a life to the glory of God. If we still sin, that does not mean that we are still sinners. When we sin, we do so as saints – as those who nevertheless remain saints.

Newness of life in Christ and through the Spirit is not determined by the Mosaic law or any other law. The law has to do with the old self, not with the new. But if you accept the law as the standard for life, then sooner or later you will get into a situation like the one described here. Incidentally, this also applies to those who in their experience have once left Romans 7 behind and moved on to Romans 8. There can be a “relapse” whenever you become legalistic and make the law the norm for the Christian. In this respect, this chapter also describes the experience of a Christian who knows the actual liberation from the law and yet tries to keep the law in his own strength.

The normal Christian life is described in Romans 8. Romans 7 does not describe the everyday life God wants for the Christian. It would be a bitter disappointment if this were the result of God’s great salvation, which cost him the death of his own Son.

6.4 Born Again or Not?

The present tense from 7:14 on (in contrast to the past tense in 7:7-11) makes it clear that the person and his experience are those of a Christian.

While from chapter 5:12 to the end of chapter 6 (or even to chapter 7:6) two great lines are described, Paul interrupts them in order to continue them again in chapter 8. In between (that is, in chapter 7) we find an exceptional situation

26. Luther’s thesis: righteous and sinners at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*). “See now, it is as I said above: ‘The saints, at the same time as they are righteous, are sinners; righteous they are because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is credited to them. But sinners they are because they do not fulfill the law (and) are not without sinful desire, but they are like sick people who are under the care of the physician,’ sick people who are really and truly sick, but healthy in beginning and in hope, or better: made healthy, that is, in the process of becoming healthy,” *Römerbriefvorlesung 1515/16* (Lectures on Romans 1515/16).

that applies only to the one who knows the law. The person in question wants to serve God, which cannot necessarily be said of an unbeliever. An unbeliever can be religious and seek God, but in the end he will do his own will. Nor will a religious person necessarily acknowledge that he is thoroughly bad. But the person in Romans 7 does come to this self-knowledge. The knowledge that we are completely corrupt, but that God and his law are absolutely perfect, can come only through the illumination of God's Spirit. One can therefore assume that this passage (7:14ff.) is about a born-again person.

His inability is also attributed to the fact that he does not (yet) have the Holy Spirit, although Paul, after a single mention in verse 6 ("in the newness of the Spirit"), does not deal with the Holy Spirit in detail until chapter 8. But the fact that the Spirit is not mentioned in 7:7-25 is due to Paul wanting first to present the relationship to the law and the powerlessness of the flesh (as a preparation for chapter 8). The presence of the Spirit in this person is no help, precisely because the Spirit did not come to help us keep the law.

If Romans 7 were about someone not yet born again, the lesson of this chapter would ultimately be a repetition of the teaching already set out; for that an unrighteous person – whether religious or not – cannot possibly please God is already found in detail in the first chapters of the letter. Paul is concerned with more. What he describes here is the nature of the flesh and its inability (even in the born-again person) to please God. The point is to show that it is precisely the redeemed person who still wants to please God by the way of the law who experiences this dilemma of 7:14-25 – and that for as long as he wants to keep the law in his own strength.

6.5 Romans 7: A Necessary Experience?

There is also the view that Romans 7 is the normal and even necessary experience of practical sanctification for every Christian. After a person has been converted and is thankful to have peace with God, so the view goes, the experience of Romans 7 sets in after some time. He feels the power of sin and cannot prevail against it. This despair ends only at the moment when he understands what Romans 8 means: Christ has accomplished everything. Only then will he recognize that the power for victory does not lie in himself, but in what God has done and does through the Holy Spirit.

But this course of development cannot be regarded as a kind of required standard for the life of faith. This chapter applies first of all to the one who knows the law, and as a rule that was the Jews. Here the Jews (that is, Jewish Christians) are addressed first of all. The Gentiles were not under the Mosaic law.

Furthermore, there is no necessity for a Christian who fully accepts and puts into practice the teaching of Romans 6 (not under law, but under grace) and 7:1-6 (“died to the law”) to get into the misery of Romans 7. Let me emphasize once again that a victorious Christian life is described only in chapter 8. So if someone to whom the law is unknown were also not familiar with chapter 7, he would probably not know the problem described there either. There is therefore no necessity to derive from chapters 5 to 8 a normal process or progression in a Christian’s life.

But you cannot get past this chapter 7 quite so easily, because the experience of many Christians often corresponds exactly to the situation described there. If it applies to those who know the law, then we must say today that not only the Jews but all Christians know it, and many have made it their rule of life. In principle, Jews and Gentiles do not differ as regards their old Adamic nature and their standing in salvation in Christ. So the experience described, when we go through it today, can be that of Jewish Christians as well as that of Gentile Christians. Many Christians have had the “Romans 7 experience.” Many are still in it because they regard it as the normal Christian life. But there are also many who have had the “Romans 8 experience.” The apostle regards Romans 8 as the normal Christian life. It should be the normal thing for Christians to live by the Spirit and not to walk according to the flesh (cf. Gal 5:16-26; 1 Cor 3:1-3). That is the life God wants and for which he has provided everything.

But why have many of us had the painful “Romans 7 experience”? Because after our conversion we noticed what a strong power sin is. Then we tried to fight against it, but with the wrong weapon and looking in the wrong direction. It was our own strength that we used. We did not realize that Christ has accomplished everything for us and at the same time gives us, through his Spirit, all the strength to be overcomers. In this respect we can be very thankful to have this chapter, because with it we can also explain this difficult phase of our Christian life (if there was one) from God’s Word and put it in its proper place. We can then show the way out to others who are living in this distress.

6.6 Who Is the Person in Romans 7?

There has been much puzzling over who the person described here might be. Is it really the personal experience of the apostle Paul, who after all speaks in the “first person”? Some things may speak for it, some against it. We will not pursue this question further here, however interesting it may be.

I believe that Paul is speaking by way of example about what many Christians know and have experienced. This is of such great importance that Paul therefore puts himself into the “role of the ‘I,’” which is not all that unusual either (see also Gal 2:18; 1 Cor 10:30).²⁷

6.7 Romans 7:1-6: Dead to the Law

The first six verses explain in a fundamental way the Christian’s relationship to the law. As in chapter 6 with regard to sin, the *legal* side is described here first. We did not actually die; rather, Christ died in our place. This death is credited to us as though we had actually died, here with the consequence that we have died to the law.

6.7.1 Verse 1: The Law Applies Only to Those Who Are Alive

Or do you not know, brothers (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law rules over a person as long as he lives?

You really do get the impression that Paul is speaking here in human terms and is presenting a very simple logic that serves to explain an important spiritual truth. The law – or any law – is addressed only to living people, who can respond to the law in the form of obedience or disobedience. A dead person simply has nothing more to do with any law at all.

27. On this, a quotation from M. Arhelger, who refers to a Greek grammar: “In order to present something generally valid in a vivid way by the example of an individual, imagined as it were as present, everyday language chooses the 1st and 2nd person singular” (F. Blass, A. Debrunner, F. Rehkopf: *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, Göttingen 1979, p. 231 on § 281).

6.7.2 Verses 2-3: The Only Way to Escape the Law

For the married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if the husband has died, she is released from the law of the husband. So then, while the husband is alive, she will be called an adulteress if she becomes another man's; but if the husband has died, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress if she becomes another man's.

An example is meant to deepen this legal situation and to add a further aspect. If someone tried to withdraw from the law (which can only happen through death, after all), he would, figuratively speaking, be committing adultery. Except through death there is no way to escape the grip of the law. Such is the example of the law of marriage. This law of marriage has lawfully joined husband and wife inseparably for life, as was God's intention from the beginning. The law of marriage no longer applies to the married couple when one partner dies, in this case the husband. But if the wife is with another man while her lawful husband is still alive, she commits adultery. The situation of the one who is under the law is exactly the same: There is no release or liberation except through death. Only then can there be a new marriage relationship. If you want to escape the law in some way other than through death, you will be all the more a transgressor and, figuratively speaking, commit adultery.

In this picture the husband stands for the law, while the wife represents the Christians whom Paul is addressing here. So how can we be set free from the law?

6.7.3 Verse 4: The One to Whom We Now Belong – Christ

So you also, my brothers, were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, in order to belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, so that we might bear fruit for God.

Since there is liberation from the law only through death, the same also applies to us. In this way Paul now applies the death of Jesus Christ, which he has already described in chapter 6 with regard to sin, to our relationship to the law.²⁸

28. In Galatians 6:14 we find the third consequence of our having died with Christ: We have died to the world.

The figures in this picture change, and it looks like this: The believer is compared with the wife. The husband stands for the law. As soon as the husband dies, the law is no longer valid.

But it is not the law that has died (nor sin; cf. chapter 6); rather, we have died. But another took on this death. The new husband is Christ, to stay with this picture. He died as our substitute.

The term “put to death” makes us think of his execution. That is what Paul means when he says that through the law he died to the law (Gal 2:19-20). The transgressor of the law must die. Paul once transgressed the law, but Paul died – in Christ, who took upon himself this legal consequence of transgressing the law. Yet in this having died with him there also lay at the same time the way out, the way to escape the law’s sphere of influence.

The death of Jesus Christ was the death of the one who was made sin in our place. The reference to his body makes us think of the whole horror of his execution and of God’s judgment on the cross. It was a gruesome death in which our old self was crucified with him.

Here too a change is spoken of. The connection with the law is dissolved, and a new connection is created, which here is even compared with a marriage covenant. We are joined to the risen one; we now belong to a man who died and rose again. The woman who marries takes on the name and rank of her husband; so do we, for through this union we are now “in Christ.”

6.7.4 Verse 5: The Law Does Not Promote Righteousness, but Sins

For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which are through the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

With regard to our past before conversion, Paul introduces a new term. We were “in the flesh” (see 8:8-9). This does not refer to our physical body but to a condition: We were in the line of Adam. The flesh must therefore have to do with sin: “In the flesh” “the passions of sins were at work.” This flesh describes human existence that is permeated by sin and its passions. It is not about the flesh in us here, but about *being in the flesh*. This condition as a descendant of Adam has its sphere of life only in the sinful flesh and cannot accomplish anything other than sin. That is why the Lord Jesus says, when he speaks of the necessity of a new birth: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that

which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Although the new birth is not the subject at this point, it is in principle about the same thing: Fruit for God cannot come from the flesh. That is why a new birth is necessary.

The law made sin “increase” (5:20). It did not merely point out sin; it provoked sin. This makes it unmistakably clear what happens when a Christian places himself under law. You will see this in the further course of this chapter, where exactly this experience is described.

6.7.5 Verse 6: A New Service of God beyond the Law

But now we have been released from the law (removed from it), having died to that by which we were held captive, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

The law did not let anyone go free or acquit anyone; it always pronounced its (righteous) verdict of guilty. But because we (that is, our old self) have died, the way is clear to enter, as it were, into a “new marriage relationship” that will never again be ended by death.

The “letter” (literally: *what is written*) is the law, which demands obedience without, however, giving the strength needed to do it. But now we have been “removed” from the law; we have been brought over. We are now in Christ Jesus, have life in him, and have the Holy Spirit in us. Paul will write later about the working, the power, and the speaking of this Spirit. In verse 6 the Spirit is mentioned for the only time in this chapter – quite different from chapter 8.

Just as chapter 6 is about the *newness of life*, here it is the *newness of the Spirit* (another translation: “the new, [namely] the Spirit”). The old has passed away; the new has come. We have a new life, and we have the Spirit of God.

6.8 Romans 7:7-14: The Perfect Law

Now that the Christian’s relationship to the law has been clearly settled (died to the law in order to belong to another, namely Christ), one could actually go straight on to chapter 8:1. But what comes now? What follows is a vindication of the law. It is addressed to the Jewish Christian, but also to anyone who either has not understood the believer’s relationship to the law (see 7:1-6) or thinks he can still try to reach the goal with its help. He gets involved with the law – with fatal consequences. His experience is now described.

If we were to apply the example Paul has just used regarding marriage to this Christian, we could say: He is committing adultery, so to speak; he is, as it were, joined to a new husband, namely Christ, while he gets involved in a relationship with the law (Gal 2:18).

The law is not the rule of life for the Christian (or: his element, just as land is not the element for a fish). That holds true even when he – as cannot be otherwise – naturally fulfills the moral commandments of God’s law as a Christian (8:4). But it is not his life’s task to fulfill the law of Moses. The Christian is not under the rule of Moses. Now it is a matter of having Christ himself as the content and rule of one’s life, of being joined to Christ and possessing the power of his Spirit. Newness of life and “the newness of the Spirit” do not consist of prohibitions, which were the hallmark of the law. Christ himself takes shape in our hearts and becomes visible through the fruit of the Spirit. Being a Christian does not consist in keeping commandments, but in being changed from the inside out – toward Christlikeness. It is not about commandments, but about a person. He is the goal.

But we have by no means become lawless now: We serve Jesus Christ. We serve him like slaves or like bondservants – him who is our Lord and Master and whose rightful property we are. We follow his commandments; they make up the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2; cf. 1 Cor 9:21). We are lawfully subject to Christ.

In this chapter it becomes clear that the law (precisely because it consists largely of prohibitions) is not addressed to those who have been justified in Christ. That is why Paul says that the law is not intended for a righteous person but for the lawless (1 Tim 1:9), to expose their sin and lead them to Christ.

6.8.1 Verse 7: Knowledge of Sin Comes through the Law

What then shall we say? Is the law sin? Far from it! But I would not have known sin except through law. For I would not have known about coveting either if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”²⁹

This question practically forces itself upon us! If the law is something from which you are set free by nothing less than the Lord Jesus’ death on the cross,

29. Exodus 20:17; cf. Deuteronomy 5:21.

then something must be wrong with the law. Again Paul gives a decisive no. If something is wrong, then the cause lies with the human being.

If we have already learned that we are no longer under the law, and if at the same time everything is in order with this law, then Paul will now explain what this law is all about.

The law has made manifest what sin is. On the basis of the law you could say exactly what a sin, that is, a transgression, consisted of. Through it the human being was to know what sin is. In this case it is a Jew, but ultimately everyone who has come into contact with this law is meant.

Paul takes the last of the Ten Commandments as an example in order to carry his thought further. Perhaps the transgression of the prohibition against coveting is the most widespread sin – a hidden sin that every hearer or reader knows from his own life. We are not to covet anything that belongs to another. It is a sin that at first takes place only in my heart and is not necessarily carried out in a corresponding deed. After all, this chapter is not about gross sins of action. The power of sin is first felt strongly within and is not recognized only through deeds.

Let us also follow this verse in the sense that we preach the law, God's standard, in order to bring about knowledge of sin in those who are lost. Without this knowledge they will not understand the need for a Savior.

6.8.2 Verse 8: The Law Promotes Sin

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced every kind of coveting in me; for apart from law sin is dead.

When the commandment meets the human being, obedience does not immediately follow, which would be the intended reaction. No, sin turns out to be a rebellious power. Sin takes the divine commandment as an occasion to do exactly what the law forbids. It is not only that sin is woken like a sleeping dog. The *most important* characteristic of sin consists in rebelling against God's commandment.

Coveting is not directed at just one single thing. It aims at everything that is desirable; in this it is many-sided and like a strong magnet that tries to draw everything to itself.

In chapter 5 it was already clearly pointed out that there was sin even without law (and independently of the law). Only it was not manifest as such, as a principle hostile to God.

Without law sin is “dead”; without law you cannot accuse anyone because of sin.

Why then did God give a law if sin was dead without law? Would it not have remained dead forever without law? The law came in *alongside* to make sin increase (cf. 5:20). The disease of sin, which has afflicted every human being since Adam, could not, so to speak, be healed by the law; it was merely identified as such. To the Galatians Paul says that the law was a “disciplinarian leading to Christ” (Gal 3:24; ER, German Bible translation); so the law showed the necessity of Jesus’ sacrifice (Gal 3:23-26). In this sense we must also use it in our evangelism.

6.8.3 Verses 9-11: The Encounter with the Law Leads to Death

But I was once alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin came to life, and I died. And the commandment that was given for life proved to be death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

By way of example (that is, not necessarily as something he experienced himself, for as a Pharisee he probably never lived “apart from law”), Paul reenacts the giving of the law: “... but when the commandment came.”

Without law a person is not aware of sin, because he cannot identify it. If he is given a law, sins become more and more manifest to him: In this sense “sin came to life.” In addition, even more sins are committed overall, because sin is provoked by the law and by its very nature acts against the law.

So there are situations in which sin comes to life, but the believer does not want this at all (for he does want to obey the law, after all). Then he feels as though he were dying. He knows the word that says, in essence: “Do this, and you will live!” But without any chance, he accepts the verdict of the law for himself and “dies.” This dying is not the death of Jesus Christ, which sets us free from sin and the law (nor is it dying with Christ); it is the death that sums up the whole inability and weakness in the face of the law.

Besides inability, death through the law may also be meant, as Paul says: He died through the law (to the law). Sin kills. God's commandment shows not only how rebelliously I react, but also that the consequence of my rebellion is death – inescapably. In this respect sin kills.

Sin is an enemy that made use of the law. How did sin deceive? Did it deceive the Christian and entice him to concentrate on the law as the rule of life that he could now fulfill as a Christian after all? Some words in this chapter make us think of the situation in paradise, where the deceiver, the liar from the beginning, was present as well.

It was not the law that killed; sin killed. This paragraph is about vindicating God's law. It was given for life, but the human being has to admit his defeat: He cannot keep the law to such an extent that he is thereby righteous before God.

The law does not appear in the Bible only in this “negative” light. As can often be seen in the OT (just think of Psalms 19 and 119), the law was a special gift to Israel. The law was a great blessing. In Romans 7 the special function of the law in bringing about the knowledge of sin is emphasized, which highlights the failure and inability of the human being. That is what is meant by “negative” light: The law is good but does not help, because the human being is not good.

The questions raised here are hardly found in this form in the OT. Imposing the law on Christians was the seduction practiced by Judaizers who traveled after Paul to confuse the churches he had founded.

Only when the gospel of grace spread did this conflict begin between old and new, between the Mosaic law and the grace of the gospel. This caused Paul in particular, the proven expert in the law, to take such a clear stand in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians “against” the Mosaic law as the way of salvation and the Christian's rule of life.

6.8.4 Verse 12: Nevertheless the Law Is Good

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

The problem is not the law but the sin in the human being. The law has all the attributes that God himself, as the lawgiver, has.

This summary makes clear what the reason is that we have died to the law and are henceforth under grace: It is not the quality of the law, but the inability

of the human being to keep it.

6.8.5 Verse 13: Once More – the Function of the Law

Did what is good, then, become death to me? Far from it! But sin,³⁰ so that it might appear as sin, by bringing about death for me through what is good, so that sin might become exceedingly sinful through the commandment.

And yet the question arises: How can God's law, that is, God's will, mean my death? – Answer: It is not the law that brings about death; no, sin brings it about. Sin is not suppressed and covered up by the good commandment, but uncovered.

Can sin become even more sinful? – You cannot make sin worse than it already is, but here it is a question of how we perceive and judge sin. You can play sin down; you can numb your conscience. But God's holy law gives me back the right perception and judgment of sin. The purpose of the law is that I see sin as God sees it, so that I am driven to the Savior.

6.9 Romans 7:14–25: Experiences of a Christian under the Law

6.9.1 Verses 14–15: The Good Will and the Weak Flesh

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin; for what I do, I do not understand (approve); for I do not do what I want, but what I hate, that I practice.

Now the spotlight shifts from the law to the human being. The law is spiritual: It comes from God. But the human being is of the flesh: The being or nature of the human being is sinful. He knows himself to be sold under sin, left alone like Joseph in a dark well. The human being is caught in a contradiction for which he has no explanation. He does not understand why everything turns out differently from what he wants. After all, he had decided for God and his law. But why now this: Unable to do what he wants (as one who wants to serve

30. The wording of this verse, which at this point does not form a complete sentence in quite a few German Bible translations (including the Elb and the ER), is to be understood as follows: "Did what is good, then, become death to me? Far from it! Rather, it was sin ..." (cf., e.g., Schlachter, Schl 2000, and Menge).

God), he is forced to do the opposite. That is precisely what shows the power and dictatorship of sin, under which he is “sold.”

6.9.2 Verse 16: Agreeing with the Law

But if I practice what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is right (excellent).

In this situation the human being even has to agree that the law is excellent, spiritual, and good. The person’s knowledge of himself increases step by step. The person vindicates the law and thus the one who gave it. Now he is able to locate the root of the evil. He will find it not just anywhere, but in himself:

6.9.3 Verses 17–21: The Sin That Dwells in Me

But now it is no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells; for the willing is present with me, but the doing of what is right I do not find (approve). For I do not practice the good that I want, but the evil that I do not want, that I do. But if I practice what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells in me. So I find the law for me, who wants to practice what is right, that evil is present with me.

The root of the evil has been located: the sin that dwells in the human being. In chapter 5:12 Paul describes how sin came into the world through Adam. Here it is described as the principle that has been at home in the human being since that day. Sin is not an abstract principle in the world around me that you can escape (in a monastery, for example). Sin has secured for itself a right of residence in the human being, in his heart. Sin itself does the evil. The person described here in Romans 7 has located the source. Yet he does not shift the responsibility for his sin, as though he had nothing to do with it. Sin is not responsible; the human being himself is responsible for what he does and does not do. Sin dwells in him, and therefore nothing “good” (ER) is to be found in his flesh. This self-knowledge has come through the law.

The good is obeying the law. Here, in principle, God’s law is being spoken of, that is, the Mosaic law. Every rule that I impose on myself like a law has the same effect as a law (see the wording “law” without the article in 7:8-9). This chapter is about a born-again person who imposes good and right rules on

himself in order to please God. But the mistake is that he tries to fulfill these rules (God's law) in his own strength and in doing so challenges the sin within him, without understanding the connection. Whoever places himself under a principle of "must"³¹ looks at himself and his rules without looking to Christ and to the power of the Spirit.

6.9.4 Verses 22-23: Two Laws and Their Effect

For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man; but I see another law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin that is in my members.

The "self-diagnosis" no longer ends with the recognition of the indwelling sin, which is not only present but also asserts itself as a law. For just as there is a source of evil, there must also be a reason why the person concerned takes delight in what comes from God. The cause of this lies in the existence of the "inner man." He stands opposite sin and, in keeping with comparable passages (Eph 3:16; 2 Cor 4:16) where the "inner man" is also spoken of, embodies the new life of the believer. The inner man does not merely stand in contrast to the outer man, that is, to the body. "Inner man" does not simply mean soul or spirit, for every human being who is born has these. The inner man is not to be understood first of all in terms of the view of man (anthropologically), which describes the inner aspect of the human being.³² Rather, the inner man is to be understood in terms of salvation (soteriologically). Salvation has not yet taken hold of our body; first we were given spiritual life, which is not yet visible outwardly. Bodily perfection will come only in the resurrection or transformation. Here something new has begun in the person, something that seeks God. He is born again.

The inner man has a "mind" (Gk. *nous*, that is, the faculty of thinking). It is the thinking renewed by the Holy Spirit. For this mind it is a natural law to want what God wants. But sin, here a victorious enemy within the person, is stronger. It too has brought a "natural law" with it. Sin sins; that is its law (its inherent principle). This is felt by a frustrated person, as the next verse says:

31. H. P. Medema, *Der Brief an die Römer*, p. 111.

32. Jürg Buchegger, *Der neue Mensch in Christus und seine tägliche Erneuerung*, p. 199, in: *Ein Mensch – was ist das?*, Wuppertal, 2004.

6.9.5 Verse 24: Despair

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

The person's self-diagnosis comes to an end, and this tormented cry follows. He does not simply want to leave his body, as though the solution of the ancient Greeks were the answer to the problem of sin. Their solution consisted in regarding the body as the cause of all evil and finding freedom in the spirit. The "body of death" is the human body under the effect of sin, which spreads possessively through his whole human existence.

The body of death, like the body of sin in chapter 6, is indeed the physical body of the human being. Because of sin it is destined for death (Rom 8:10-13). The difference from the Greek solution is that the Christian affirms the body (even though it is destined for death) and places it at the Lord's disposal. He can do this because Christ himself now dwells in this body through the Holy Spirit. The final solution then lies in the resurrection of the body (not in departing from the body); in the meantime, however, the person may put to death the evil deeds of the body by the Spirit (Rom 8:12-13).

With the cry found here, the person concerned longs not only for redemption, but above all for a Redeemer! The letter of the law made demands without emotion, without giving strength. It is the Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in grace and love gave his life for each person personally and gives strength (Phil 4:13; 2 Cor 12:9, etc.).

6.9.6 Verse 25: The Lesson of Romans 7

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with the mind, but with the flesh the law of sin.

For the first time the Savior is mentioned by name. This is the key to the door of the mighty dungeon in which the believer has locked himself up. If there is anyone who rescues from this situation, it is Jesus Christ our Lord. This points to a believer who is speaking of his Lord. Now at last direction and goal are right. More than in any other chapter of the Bible, in Romans 7 you read "I" and "I" and "I" again. That is where the problem lies. Paul may have

deliberately chosen this example in this way in order to give a striking warning against a path toward the “I” and the “self” and toward the law. As long as we are focused on our own inner struggle, we simply cannot see Christ and walk the way of the Spirit. The despairing Christian no longer throws the anchor into his own boat as before, but sinks it in Jesus Christ.³³

The sudden thanksgiving is the turning point in the misery. Thanksgiving means: It is not I who accomplish something; another does something for me. Chapter 8 shows what the thanks is for, namely for God’s saving act in Christ, which solved not only my problem of guilt but also my “sin problem.” What I am by nature has been put away and brought to an end. The laborious ascent of Mount Sinai, the mountain of the law, is over. Golgotha and the grace given there for rescue and for life are now the goal!

The conclusion of chapter 7 contrasts the two natures that are in the believer (7:25). At this point, however, it is not the constant daily struggle between flesh and Spirit (as described in Galatians 5), but the groundbreaking realization that there are two governing principles in the believer. There are two principles in me: On the one hand – with the flesh – I serve sin. The origin of this principle is now clearly identified: It is the sin that dwells in my flesh. On the other hand – with the renewed mind – I serve the law of God. This origin too is clear: It is the inner man – the new life given by God.

The flesh is the dynamic of the “old I,” of what is godless and of this world, of the present age – indeed, of everything that sin has brought with it. The mind is the means by which the inner man wants to do God’s law. In 7:25 Paul sums up the dilemma: By means of the renewed thinking he delights in God’s law; by means of the flesh he serves the governing principle of sin. It is the person, the “I,” that serves either the one or the other, and does so in full responsibility for his decision. So we can speak of two abilities or capacities³⁴ that I use for everything I do. One of the two capacities is always active; there is nothing neutral. Every action (simply everything I think and do) is determined by one of these abilities. So how does the capacity of the Spirit break through in my life?

33. William MacDonald, *Kommentar zum NT* (Believer’s Bible Commentary), vol. 1, p. 641.

34. Charles C. Ryrie, *Ausgewogen statt abgehoben* (Balancing the Christian Life), Dillenburg 1994, p. 43. The English word “capacity” also has the meaning of “ability.”

We are eager to see how Paul answers and what way he shows. But we can anticipate the answer and put it in one sentence: What the law could not do, Christ has now done for us (as a historical fact), and the Spirit “fulfills” it in us today (as a real experience).³⁵

35. Gordon Fee, *Der Geist Gottes und die Gemeinde* (Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God), Metzingen, 2005, p. 188.

7. Romans 8:1-11: Free at Last!

The chain of argument in the first five chapters about the righteousness of God on the one hand and the guilt and sin of human beings (whether Jew or Gentile) on the other led to salvation through the blood of Christ (3:23-25). God gave his Son as an atonement. The blood of Jesus fulfills God's righteous demand. But after Jesus had sacrificed himself for us, God raised him from the dead for our justification. Now God, the holy and righteous Judge, declares righteous the one who believes in Jesus Christ *and* in the God who raised him from the dead. In chapter 5:1 Paul sums it up:

Since we have now been justified by faith, we have peace with God!

Up to this point you might think that the high point of the letter had been reached, so that another one would hardly be possible. But then Paul takes up the deeper problem. From 5:12 on, it is no longer about guilt and atonement, but about the moral nature of the human being. It is about sin as a power and as a principle that has grown inseparably together with every human being. What a person *has done* can be forgiven him. What he *is* (morally speaking) cannot be forgiven, because that would mean justifying sin.

In chapter 5 Paul explains the origin and effect of sin, in chapter 6 the liberation from sin. In chapter 7 Paul dealt with the relationship of the law to the Christian. In the second half he described the experience of a person whom we can assume to be a child of God. This Christian tries, out of good motives, to please God by making the law his rule of life. But he has overlooked something crucial: The Christian has died to the law, just as he has died to sin. He has not understood that the law from Sinai stands for a whole "system" in which the principle of performance applies. But the law was given precisely to prove the weakness and inability of the flesh. It made clear that the human being is a sinner and needs God to intervene. Through the law sin came to life (7:9); through the law sin became exceedingly sinful (7:13). If a believer gets involved with this oldness of the letter, he will end up in despair, for the sin in him will be stronger than his renewed will.

The words "Wretched man that I am!" come from the awareness that sin is invincible. In Romans 7 the Christian sees only himself; he does not see that he

is justified, washed, and sanctified in Christ. He has not grasped his new identity in Christ. Whoever realizes his new identity (as described in chapter 8) no longer has to say, “Wretched man that I am!” And yet: Whenever he takes a false step or sins, and a “work of the flesh” (Gal 5:19) is accordingly present in him, he should sincerely condemn it and confess it before God. Every genuine confession of sin is bound up with sorrow and repentance. That is part of spiritual growth and a prerequisite for it.

Romans 8 throws the door into life wide open for us: acquittal in Christ and freedom in the Spirit as sons and children of God on the way to glory. We have not yet arrived; we are still in the body of death and in a creation that is subject to corruption.

7.1 Already – Not Yet

We have been saved in hope (Rom 8:24-25; ER, German Bible translation). Our justification, which made us righteous instead of sinners, is certain, but it is obtained only through faith. What we possess in faith is the “already.” But it is obvious that we have not yet reached perfection. The best is yet to come, and that is what we refer to as the “not yet.”

The new age of Christ: eternal life, working of the Spirit, grace, freedom, resurrection, renewal, peace, righteousness, consummation

The first coming of Christ and his work fulfill the “already”: justification, gift of the Spirit

Earthly life in faith and hope – Already – not yet

Present age

The second coming of Christ fulfills the “not yet”:

- The future glory 8:18
- Sonship, the redemption of our body 8:23
- Freedom of the glory of the children of God 8:21
- Creation set free 8:21

The age of Adam: sin, death, flesh, law, bondage, transience, corruption, futility

The diagram is meant to illustrate this apparent contradiction and the tension that exists between these two points. The circle is the overlap where the age of Adam has not yet ended but that of Christ has already begun. In this time the

life of the future has already been granted to God's people, while at the same time the consummation is still to come.

This time of faith, of hope, and of persevering in faith is accompanied by the imperatives of salvation. Their encouragements, exhortations, and emphatic pointers apply to us and are meant to motivate us to hold out to the end, so that we can complete the whole marathon of faith. God's grace will bring it about through his Spirit that we reach the goal. This is the theme of chapter 8. Our hope comes alive when we pay balanced attention to the *already – not yet* in Paul and in the whole NT. Chapters 6 – 8 are a striking example of this guiding idea.

The *indicative of salvation* corresponds to the *already*, that is, to what we have already received. The *imperative of salvation* directs our gaze to what is *not yet*, but what we will attain: the glory of eternal life and a liberated creation. God's salvation does not exclude human action, decision, and perseverance. We are to become what we are. Warning and promise, exhortation and assurance stand side by side and never exclude each other.

7.2 The Breakthrough

Chapter 8 is perhaps the “highest” mountain peak in this letter and one of the highest in the whole Bible. Now that liberation from sin has been fully explained, Paul shows where, and through what circumstances of life, the path of those who have been set free will lead in order to reach God's goal (the consummation).

“This chapter leads us into the innermost circle and to the heart of Christianity; it deals with the special state of blessedness, the purest joy, the joy that has come to understanding, to which the world is in no way able to offer anything even remotely comparable.”³⁶

36. C. J. Ellicott and W. Sanday (eds.), *A Bible Commentary for Bible Students*, p. 233.

7.3 Verse 1: Acquittal – No More Sentence of Condemnation

*So there is now no condemnation (no sentence of condemnation) for those who are in Christ Jesus.*³⁷

This is one of the greatest and richest sentences in the Bible. This word drives away every fear. It is a shout of joy in a lost world that is heading toward judgment. For people who are plagued by despair because of their knowledge of sin, this good news has an existential effect: liberation, peace, assurance, and security. This place, this standing in Christ, is safer than any atomic bomb shelter. Nothing can happen to us in Christ, because it would have to strike him first. And he can take on anything. Here it is God's sentence of condemnation, which would rightly have struck us if he had not taken it upon himself. And because we are in him and remain in him forever, we go through everyday life with this security. All legal questions have been settled. We have not only been declared righteous; we are even inseparably joined with Christ: Being in Christ means nothing other than that God sees not us but Christ when he looks down on us.

This fundamental statement assures us that the future condemnation on the day of judgment, as well as eternal condemnation, have for us who are in Christ been moved from the future into the past: Our condemnation has already taken place.

This condemnation was not withdrawn or annulled because God is simply gracious to us. God's nature does not change. He will never give up or deny his glory, his holiness, and his righteousness. Why then is there no condemnation for those who are in Christ? – Because the sentence of condemnation on us, that is, on our old self, was carried out on Christ (6:6; 8:3). It struck *him*, not us. The protection from condemnation does not consist in Jesus having been perfect in his life and having fulfilled the law. No, the sentence of condemnation not only had to be pronounced but also carried out, which

37. There are manuscripts that attest the following translation: *There is therefore now no condemnation at all for those who (are) in Christ Jesus; (they are) those who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* Those who are in Christ do not owe their standing to their walk according to the Spirit: Rather, the logical consequence of being in Christ is to walk according to the Spirit. Standing and state are often wrongly set far apart from each other – a state of affairs Paul would not have understood. This translation corresponds entirely to the unity of the indicative and the imperative of salvation. So it is not about being saved by works, but about the change of life as the normal consequence of salvation.

happened on the cross and in Jesus' death. Not his holy life but his death is our salvation.

One day every human being will have to come into the presence of the Eternal One. This is the day of wrath and the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgment (Rom 2:5). On this day the secrets of people will be judged (Rom 2:16). We will all stand before the judgment seat of God, and each one will give an account of himself (Rom 14:10). Whenever this moment comes, we are in Christ. We have already been made righteous, so that we need not fear this moment. We have no trial to expect. The judgment has already taken place. The wrath of God (Rom 1:18) does not strike us; we have been justified by Christ's blood and will be saved from wrath (Rom 5:9).

In faith we now grasp our standing in salvation in Christ. But on that day it will become manifest; then it will be experienced and visible reality: complete acquittal and acceptance as children there at God's throne! Then we will have come from faith to sight.

God has placed us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30). This is absolute protection from God's judgment, but at the same time it is also the beginning of a completely new life in the risen one. For this theme, which he in particular deals with, Paul uses the phrase "being in Christ."³⁸ This is the heart of the Christian faith, the closest union with Christ, who is now on God's throne. Nothing less than this now makes up the legal (juridical) standing of the believer before God, and the same applies to the new atmosphere of life into which he has now been brought. This describes both his standing and the justification and dynamic of his life. "Being in Christ" means "living in Christ." A. T. Pierson compared the words "in Christ" to a small key that can unlock a mighty lock in a great gate to a palace. In Christ we have been brought right up to God's throne. There we are accepted in the Beloved, the Son of God.

It is not about feelings, nor about your own efforts, if you want to come into the new standing ("in Christ"). A Christian does not have to strain to reach this standing. That would be like someone who is in a room but still keeps trying to get into this room, as Watchman Nee put it.

38. This term and similar expressions that characterize our union with Christ occur more than 190 times in the NT.

7.4 Verse 2: Set Free by the Law of the Spirit of Life

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.

What does the believer find in Christ Jesus, in his “new home”? What does he now share in when he is in Christ? There he shares in the whole power of life that Christ possesses in the resurrection.

Two laws – or governing principles – are contrasted. The one power works toward death, the other toward life. Whoever is joined to Christ can overcome sin and death. The one law has broken the other because it is stronger. It is not about two laws existing side by side, but about victory in Christ. This is to become the very practical experience of the Christian, which Paul also explains in what follows. But first the victory must be won, so that one can claim such a law of the Spirit of life at all. It is not the Christian who is to fight this battle; another has won this victory for him: Christ.

The law of sin and death has been compared to the law of gravity. A bird overcomes this law by the law of aerodynamics. The bird does not fall to the ground but flies wherever it wants. Flying is an ability that is natural to it, without its having to strain doggedly for it. It is not aware that it is thereby breaking through the law of gravity. It does what it was created for. In the same way this law of the Spirit of life has set the Christian free, and it continues to work in him constantly. It is the Holy Spirit who gives this freedom and keeps it alive. The Christian may be sure of the working of this law, and – as with the bird – it should be the normal thing for him.

Chapter 8 deals mainly with the Holy Spirit, while chapter 7 deals with one's own human “I.” The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the Spirit of life. In Adam and all his descendants the law of sin and death was at work. In Christ the Spirit and the life of the risen one are now at work with incomparably greater power.

7.5 Verse 3: God Solves the Problem of Sin at Golgotha

For what was impossible for the law, because it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness (sameness) of the flesh of sin and for sin, and condemned sin in the flesh ...

The law could neither solve the problem of sin nor give life and strength to keep it and live by it. It could not improve the human being morally or make him new. The flesh (the natural and therefore sinful and this-worldly dynamic of Adam's descendants) was weak and unable. But God set everything in motion because he is gracious and merciful. What we could not do, *he* did. What a liberating word, which in this context applies especially to those who still want to do something themselves and place themselves under the compulsion of doing and having to!

7.5.1 God Becomes Man

God did it. This is the final end of everything that people can do or want to do. God does the magnificent, the unimaginable: He sent his only Son. He sent neither angels nor a human being. He gave his Son, with whom he is united in infinite love and eternal fellowship. God the Son became man. He was not born into the “flesh of sin,” but sent in the “likeness” of the flesh of sin. He became like human beings, yet without sin. Without sin, but *for* sin, he was sent. His divine mission was to become a sacrifice for sin. The expression “for sin” is often used for the sin offering in the OT. That is exactly the sacrifice he was to become, because all sacrifices until then could only be a reminder of sin! He was aware at every moment of his sinless life that he would become this once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

The Word became flesh, yet without sin. Sin was in all human beings; its nature is called “sin in the flesh.” Of Jesus it was true only that he was in the flesh (in human existence), without sin. That was the non-negotiable and necessary prerequisite for being able to become the sacrifice for sin on behalf of others.

The expression “likeness of the flesh of sin” on the one hand includes the emphasis that God the Son really became man (“likeness” here means more than “similarity,” because otherwise doubts about his true humanity would be permissible). On the other hand, the expression includes the fact that his humanity was not seized by sin as is the case with all human beings.

7.5.2 Golgotha

The incomprehensible happened: God condemned (sentenced) “sin in the flesh” and took his Son as a sin offering for it. In this way God carried out on him the sentence of condemnation on sin. Christ took our sinful nature upon himself (he made himself what we were) and exposed himself to God’s holy judgment in our place. God did not spare his Son (8:32)! In chapter 6:6 Paul says the same thing: We have been crucified with him. In chapter 7:4 he describes this in other words (“put to death through the body of Christ”). On the cross the trial against sin was held and the death sentence carried out. The Savior took upon himself as our substitute both the condemnation and death as the wages of sin!

Although he is the eternal Son of his love, God treated him on the cross as the greatest sinner – as the one on whom the whole sin of humanity lay. God’s wrath struck without mercy the one who was holy and righteous and hated sin. He was made sin (and a sin offering) for us (2 Cor 5:21). This event comprises the darkest hours in the history of humanity. The extraordinary global darkness that prevailed on that day from 12 noon to 3 in the afternoon bears witness to this mystery. No one could witness what happened. God strikes his own Son, who is physically at the end of his strength but meets the holy God with full awareness. Then he gives up his life into death. The Savior cries out into the universe the most important words ever spoken: “It is finished.”

So we understand that there can be no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He has taken it upon himself. He delivered himself up to the absolute holiness and righteousness of God by loading upon himself what we were by nature (all the marks of our standing “in Adam”), as though he were responsible for it. Everything I deserved he took from me. It was a divine sacrifice, and it applies to all who are now in Christ. This is God’s answer to our failure, our sin, and our inability to serve God. He has placed our justification from our sins and from sin on an absolutely righteous and therefore unassailable basis. God’s demand was met. To create something new, it was necessary to judge the old: Sin had to be condemned in the flesh of Jesus (in the Word become flesh) according to God’s own standards, in agreement with his righteousness, holiness, and glory. In this way God was glorified in every

respect and his demands fully satisfied. The raising and enthronement of Jesus is the proof of this. God has come to complete rest in the work of redemption of his Son.

But let us note what the goal of this saving act is:

7.6 Verse 4: God's Law Is Fulfilled After All

... so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Salvation through Jesus' accomplished sacrificial death now flows into our practical life, our walk. The goal of salvation is that the law is now fulfilled by the Christian after all (in contrast to chapter 7). This verse is the answer to Romans 7! After studying chapter 7, the question did remain whether God's law would never get beyond the function of merely uncovering sin. Since God's law is righteous and absolutely good, it would surely amount to a defeat for God if no one – except Jesus, of course – could fulfill it. And so it is: Now those who are in Christ fulfill the law. The requirement of the law is now fulfilled in them, and that through the Spirit of God.

This is not about every commandment of the Mosaic law. The problem of the person in Romans 7 was not the ritual law but the moral part of the Mosaic law. He pins the dilemma of his situation on the last of the Ten Commandments (a commandment of a moral kind): “You shall not covet!” (7:7; Exod 20:17; cf. Deut 5:21). It is through the moral commandments that sin becomes manifest (see also Jas 2:8-11). Coveting, the lust of unlawful desire (for whatever it may be), is something we encounter every day, and it begins in our hearts.

This commandment is now fulfilled by the believer in the power of the Holy Spirit. He can thus resist desire and overcome it. More than that, he will find the following: When he consciously walks the way of the Spirit, desire increasingly loses its attraction for him. He no longer wants to possess what is wrong and belongs to others – what is (by earthly standards) bigger, more beautiful, and better.

Paul's “new” ethic, that is, the “newness of the Spirit” (7:6), does not consist of old or new rules or laws. Rather, in the power of the Spirit we are already living the life of the future today – a life that expresses God's own nature, as we

have come to know it in Christ Jesus. The standard of this life is not the Mosaic law but the law of Christ (Gal 6:2), the truth that is in Christ (Eph 4:20-22) and that we encounter throughout the NT. Of course the law of Christ and the Mosaic law can never contradict each other, since they have the same origin and author. The core of the law of Moses is love, which is also the center of the law of Christ. But in the latter law love goes much further: Christ himself and his love are the standard.

7.6.1 The Mosaic Law and Its Validity

We must distinguish between the “eternal moral law of God”³⁹ and the Mosaic law, whose validity is limited in time. God’s eternal moral law is the absolute norm of what is right and wrong before God. It is the expression of God’s holy and unchangeable nature toward human beings. God’s moral law has always existed, because it consists of the requirements of his eternal nature. People can live in harmony with God’s absolute moral law without being under the Mosaic law.

It is precisely this new situation that Paul explains here. The Christian is set free from the Mosaic law as far as the way to salvation and also the standard of life are concerned. But that does not make him “lawless” in any way. He is now lawfully subject to Christ (1 Cor 9:21), and there at least the rules apply that are contained in the moral part of the Mosaic law.⁴⁰ The “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) as the law of the Spirit of life (8:2) and the (new) commandment of love (John 13:34; 15:12, etc.) do connect with the Mosaic law and nowhere contradict it, but they go much further. Now believers have become imitators of God and of Christ. The rule is: Walk in love, in the love of Christ, which gave itself even to death (Eph 5:2)! That is more than a law. The Mosaic law, as it were, stays behind here and can no longer keep up with the new standard in the light of

39. Ernst G. Maier, *Die biblische Lehre von den Heilszeiten*, Hünfeld, 2007, pp. 80ff. The term “eternal moral law of God” does not occur in the Bible, any more than other theological terms do (Trinity, old and new nature, etc.), but it is useful for describing a biblical truth concisely.

40. The Ten Commandments in the NT: With the exception of the Sabbath commandment, all the other nine (moral) commandments are not only repeated in the NT but made stricter and/or changed from a prohibition into a positive commandment! 1st commandment: 1 Cor 8:4-6; 2nd commandment: 1 Cor 10:7, 14; 3rd commandment: Col 3:8; 5th commandment: Eph 6:2; 6th commandment: Matt 5:22; 1 John 3:16; 7th commandment: Matt 5:28; Eph 5:25; 8th commandment: Eph 4:28; 1 John 3:17; 9th commandment: Eph 4:25; 10th commandment: Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 6:10, etc.

the revelation of the Son of God and his work of redemption. This is the expression of a relationship; this is sonship; this is individual guidance; this is a new creation (Gal 6:15-16).

The revelation and application of God's eternal moral principles change in the different periods of salvation history. Although the Mosaic law has lost its validity, God's eternal moral principles, which are expressed in the law of Moses, remain. For we find them again in the law of Christ. Paul gives an example in Romans 13:8-10. The commandment of the new life consists in this: that we are to love one another. In doing so we also fulfill the Mosaic law, because love is the sum of the law (Gal 5:14-15; 1 Tim 1:5-11; Matt 22:34-40). This sum, namely love, also corresponds to the law of Christ.

Christ is on the one hand the end, but also the goal and the fulfillment of the Mosaic law (Rom 10:4). He alone kept the Mosaic law perfectly. But beyond that, God's eternal moral law is perfectly unveiled in the man Jesus Christ. As the eternal Word (John 1:1-3), Christ in his person is the perfect expression of the will and law of God. The "law of Christ" comprises a perfect revelation of God's eternal moral law and as such surpasses the Old Testament law. That is why the Christian's standard is now no longer the letter of the Mosaic law, but a person: Christ himself has been written on our hearts by the Spirit.

In other words: The facts of the new covenant come into force. The law is planted in the hearts (that is, in the center of a person's will and decisions), so that those concerned can live according to this law from the inside out through the power of the Holy Spirit. This law is embodied by no one other than Christ himself (Heb 8:10; 10:16; 2 Cor 3:6, 18; Jer 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezek 36:24-27).

7.7 Verse 5: Being according to the Flesh or according to the Spirit

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who are according to the Spirit, on the things of the Spirit.

Paul does not stop drawing further, in what follows, the two lines he began in Romans 5:12. In the present context he is not writing about whether a Christian lives spiritually or in a fleshly way. He is still concerned with the fundamental distinction. "Being according to the flesh" means still belonging to Adam's family. But those "who are according to the Spirit" are "in Christ." Yet neither

position is an abstract matter. Life, thinking, and action are shaped – either by the Spirit or by the flesh. The flesh shapes the unbeliever, the Spirit the believer.

The flesh is the sinful nature of the human being – what he has become in his whole existence and way of life through indwelling sin. The unbeliever is “flesh” (John 3:6). He lives from the flesh and according to the flesh; he is oriented toward himself and toward this world. He cannot do otherwise, even if he wanted to. He is determined by his flesh. His willing, thinking, and acting are marked by the dynamic of what is of this world, visible, and worldly.

The Christian, by contrast, is “according to the Spirit.” This means that the Spirit has granted him salvation and that he derives his new origin from there: That which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). On this basis a new direction of life, new interests, and a view into what is eternal and heavenly arise.

7.8 Verses 6-7: Death and Life, Hostility and Peace

For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace, because the mindset of the flesh is hostility toward God, for it does not submit to the law of God, for it cannot do so.

The difference could not be clearer. The striving (the mindset) of the flesh carries death within it, that is, transience and corruption. The person who is still in the flesh does not perceive this. He thinks he can live a self-determined life, but he is manipulated by sin. He does not notice that this life leads to death (physical as well as eternal). Although he fears death, he regards it as something normal and does not recognize this connection between flesh and death.

The Spirit of God, however, brings about life and peace. This life is not biological life, but spiritual, eternal life. Peace with God is the basis of this new life. Peace is what all people long for, but it is attained only in the power of the Holy Spirit. Life in the Spirit is marked by this peace; it is a peace that lets the believer rest trustingly in God’s hand. In his doctrinal letters Paul explains how this spiritual life and peace show themselves in our human existence. Here he still stays with the fundamental contrast, which seems abstract.

The nature of the sinful flesh is not a passive thing. It consists, even if it is not perceived that way, in hostility toward God. The flesh rejects the law. God’s authority is an enemy to the flesh. It is the nature of the flesh to banish God

from life. The flesh is unable and unwilling to keep God's law. This also applies to the Christian. His flesh, his old fleshly nature, which is still in him even in his new standing in salvation, behaves in exactly the same way (if it is given the freedom to do so) and likewise cannot keep the law. The flesh *in us* too is hostility toward God. But we are not "in the flesh," as the next verse shows:

7.9 Verses 8-9: Being in the Flesh and in the Spirit

But those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.

The term "being in the flesh" refers to what a person is by nature as a descendant of Adam. His life is shaped and determined by it in everything he is and does. It is his element, as water is the fish's. It must be clear beyond all doubt, says Paul, that in the flesh you can never please God, not even with the help of the law.

The Christian is no longer "in Adam" but "in Christ," which is equated here with the fact that he is "in the Spirit." Because the Spirit of God dwells in every believer, the believer is also "in the Spirit" from the moment this Spirit took possession of him. If we are in the Spirit, then we are in the person of the Holy Spirit, just as we are in the person of Christ. This divine person, the Spirit of God, dwells in us just as Christ does. It follows that our condition is now described as "in the Spirit." We are "in Christ," and we are "in the Holy Spirit." In other words, we are in God (Col 3:3; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 John 4:15-16; Jude 1). That is our new "home," our new atmosphere of life, which is filled with life, grace, peace, and righteousness. "Being in the Spirit" means that from now on the Spirit of God produces his fruit in us and directs our mindset, our striving. After all, this Spirit does not work differently from or independently of Jesus Christ, into whom we have been placed. That is why the same Spirit is also called the "Spirit of Christ." Christ is the center and the goal in this new life, and the Spirit of God sets great store by making Christ great in our lives.

If Christ does not come into his own in the life of a believer, and the person in question does not love him, the only possible conclusion is that he does not belong to him. This is an appeal for self-examination, so that no one lulls himself into a false sense of security.

The Spirit of Christ is like the seal here, which symbolizes whose property one is. Although sealing with the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here (cf. Eph 1:13), the indication of ownership (namely the fact that the pronoun “his” is used in the sense of belonging to Christ) hints at this aspect.

7.10 Verses 10-11: The Spirit of God and the Rescue of Our Body

But if Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you (or through his Spirit who dwells in you).

7.10.1 Our Standing in Salvation – the Indicative of Salvation – the “Already”

- We are in Christ Jesus.
- We are in the Spirit.
- We are according to the Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is in us.
- We have the Spirit of Christ.
- Christ is in us.

There is a striking correspondence between Christ and the Spirit. They are two distinct persons, but they have *one* goal. In the Godhead, in the Tri-unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it cannot be otherwise. The triune God was at work in our salvation, and he is also at work now in our sanctification!

7.10.2 Living and Dying

Death is mentioned again and again in chapters 5 to 8. In the foreground is physical death, which, however, cannot be separated from eternal death (the consequence of God’s sentence of condemnation). Our body is still under this consequence of sin. Obviously Paul distinguishes here between the inner side – Christ in you – and the outer side, namely the body. The body is dead (subject to death, dying) – because of sin. But that does not apply to the inner side, for it is in the hand of the Spirit of life. God’s salvation affects the inner side of the

human being first. This inner side is not described in more detail (for instance, by using the terms “soul” or “spirit”), but is referred to only by the personal pronoun “you.” In the present context the Spirit mentioned here is not the human spirit but the divine Spirit. He has brought about life through the law of the Spirit of life (8:2).

Just as sin is responsible for death, so in the believer God’s righteousness is responsible for life. Righteousness is the basis for the new life. The one righteous act of Jesus Christ led to justification of life (5:18); we have been brought into the standing of the righteous (5:19).

We are still in the body, which does not differ in substance from the body of an unbeliever. The fact that Christ is in us has no effect on the body during earthly life. The body does not already become immortal through it. But this is only provisional, for the resurrection power in Christ will also take hold of the body. The whole person as a complete unity is the goal of divine salvation. It is not only about “saving the soul,” but much more about the restoration of the original creation.

And even that would fall short, for salvation does not merely restore the original condition of Adam, created in God’s image, but will transform us into the image of his Son (8:29). For the day is coming when we will be like him, Jesus (1 John 3:2). On that day we will no longer bear the image of the one “of dust” (the image of Adam), but that of the heavenly one, that is, Christ (1 Cor 15:49). The resurrection will demonstrate that God has overcome *all* the consequences of sin, for his own glory and for our salvation.

7.10.3 God's Spirit and the Body

The Spirit of God who dwells in us is the reason why we will one day be raised. This Spirit dwells in our body and has taken charge of our body. Our body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit; the body belongs to the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19)! The Spirit is the guarantee of our future resurrection from the dead. The reason for the future resurrection is that now, while we live in our earthly body, the Spirit dwells in us. The Spirit wants to dwell in this temple again, for after physical death has occurred he had to give it up for a time. The Lord Jesus says that the Spirit will be with us forever (John 14:16); he will also dwell in our resurrection body. It is important to see this connection of the

Spirit with our *body*, since we often connect this Spirit only with our human *spirit*.

The Holy Spirit is on the one hand the *reason* for the raising of our bodies, but he will equally be God's *instrument* for raising our bodies.

7.10.4 Why Not Immortal Already?

Could God not have given our body immortality already now, together with his salvation? Why does the body (if Christ does not return before then) sometimes have to become sick and go through death? The answer seems to be this: God has a plan for the world. His goal is a new creation. It has already begun in us; we (the believers) are already part of the new creation, an "anticipation," so to speak, a firstfruits. The new age has already begun in us: "Already" and at the same time "not yet" – that is how our interim status on the way to the consummation can be described.

Let us imagine that we were already immortal now. Then everyone would gladly become a Christian for that reason alone, in order to be immortal as well. But God sends the good news so that people will repent and believe. The question is not raised directly in this letter, yet Paul goes into the question of sufferings and tribulations and into the redemption of our body later in this chapter. We live in the tension of the "already – not yet," which consists in the fact that the body is still subject to illnesses and death, while we have already received the full blessing of salvation, which is a foretaste of eternity. Romans 8:24 gives the answer to the question asked in the section heading: We have been saved in hope (cf. the wording in the ER, German Bible translation). But a hope that is seen (for example, in the form of the immortal body) is not hope.

8. Romans 8:12-17: The Imperative of Salvation – Living in Victory

God's salvation does not end with our being entered in the book of life, but has a direct effect on everyday life. That is where salvation becomes visible. The new life involves not only a new "employment relationship" (from one slavery to another), but above all a "love relationship": We have been adopted by God and have thus become children of God. As such we are now on our way through a fallen creation and a hostile world. That will remain so until the day our bodies are transformed. This happens through resurrection (of those who have fallen asleep in Christ) or directly (through the transformation of those still living at that time) – namely at the coming of Jesus. Then at last our sonship will be complete (8:23) and the future glory attained (8:18).

Paul does not call the Romans' salvation into question. He addresses them as brothers to whom the Spirit of God gives the assurance that they are children of God. We are this for all time, for the future will and is to make manifest what we now grasp only in faith (and not yet visibly). When he now (as in all his letters) speaks of an "if" and a "then" and in doing so uses conditional sentences⁴¹ with regard to salvation, he does not say this to unsettle them. He expresses neither doubt nor certainty by it. Rather, he calls on them to ask themselves self-critical questions: What about me? Do I have the Spirit? Am I on the right path? He implicitly assumes that they will answer these questions with yes. They are warnings that, despite the assurance of salvation, call on us to become what we are. We are to live the life we have received from God. These warnings serve to help us reach the goal. They direct our gaze to the "not yet" – forward, to God's own glory, where we will be at home.

8.1 Verse 12: No Longer Obligated to the Flesh

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

It is an obligation for all who are in Christ Jesus no longer to live according to the flesh from now on. Paul has described the flesh, the sinful nature, clearly

41. That is, if-clauses.

enough in contrast to the Spirit. The flesh's claim of ownership is a thing of the past: We have been set free. The flesh as part of our humanity has not been removed, but rendered ineffective. It may no longer determine our lives. That is why it is impossible to be in any way still obligated to this flesh. The flesh, on the other hand, behaves as though we were its debtors, that is, obligated to it, as was indeed the case before conversion. The reminder to the brothers is necessary because we remain open to attack: We are people who are vulnerable to the temptation of the flesh until our last day in the body.

Are we, then, debtors to the Spirit? We would certainly have expected Paul to finish the sentence that way. Instead, he describes how a life according to the flesh ends and what a life in the power of the Spirit looks like:

8.2 Verse 13: Life or Death

For if you live according to the flesh, you will (must) die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Paul's words are unadorned. The warning is clear: If you, brothers, live according to the flesh, you will die. The nature of the flesh, namely hostility toward God, remains unchanged, even in the believer. "Living according to the flesh" is the description of people who are in the flesh (8:5-8). This is a warning meant to protect against self-deception. If someone *lives* according to the flesh, there is the possibility that he *is in the flesh* – that is, on the broad road that leads to eternal destruction. But here this warning is addressed to (genuine) brothers! Despite the fact that Paul is certain of their salvation and does not call it into question, he issues the warning: Do not live according to the flesh, for that brings death with it! And in this context he means eternal death.

8.2.1 Promises and Warnings, and Eternal Salvation

This warning to the brothers suggests a conceivable loss of salvation. Is that the possibility Paul is considering with this warning? I do not think so. Traffic signs warn of conceivable consequences, not of probable ones. When we drive on the road, we make decisions that affect our safety. Traffic signs warn of curves, crosswinds, and deer crossings. They are not there to unsettle me. They are not meant to frighten me into thinking that I could cause an accident because I am not able to drive well enough. Rather, they warn of various real

dangers. They stimulate my imagination as to what could happen if I disregard the warnings. It is not a contradiction to have God's promise on the one hand and at the same time to hear the warning, because we are not to slacken in our efforts actually to lay hold of the promise. There is a helpful comparison from the life of Paul. On his journey to Rome the ship gets into severe distress at sea, so that all despair of their lives. In this situation Paul passes on, in essence, the promise he received from an angel: "All will be saved!" After some days land comes into sight, and some of the sailors want to escape in the lifeboat in order to save

themselves. Paul warns the soldiers against letting them do so, because without the sailors everyone would perish (Acts 27). Was Paul warning that God's promise might possibly not come true? Or was he appealing to reason because he foresaw what would happen if people did not hold on to God's promise? The firm promise and the urgent warning in this story relate to each other exactly as the biblical promises (they assure us that we will be saved in the end) relate to the biblical warnings and exhortations (they require us to persevere to the end in faith in Jesus Christ).

"God warns of conceivable consequences, not of probable ones. So it is with us too. Scripture tells us that God holds securely all who are in Jesus Christ (8:29-39). At the same time it also exhorts us to persevere in obedience to Jesus Christ, because otherwise we will be eternally lost (8:12-13). Is that a hopeless contradiction? Must one doubt God's promises in order to be able to obey and believe his warning? No! God holds us securely in Christ by using warnings and exhortations that, just like the initial call of the gospel, are formulated in terms of possibilities or conditions. God never contradicts his promises ...⁴² He appeals to our understanding so that, in the face of disobedience, we believe and obey him. That is why God strengthens our faith by assuring us that he will keep us to the end, but also by" emphatically urging us "to remain steadfastly faithful to Jesus Christ."⁴³

Blessings and Promises – Tied to Conditions

42. The author of the quotation wants to make clear here that God's promises and warnings can never be played off against each other.

43. Thomas Schreiner, *Mit Ausbarren laufen – Gibt es Heilsgewissheit ohne Heiligung?*, Oerlinghausen, 2009, p. 219.

Rom 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; ... but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Rom 8:14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God, ... these are sons of God.

Rom 8:17 ... if indeed we suffer with him, ... so that we may also be glorified with him.

1 Cor 15:1-2 Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel that I preached to you, ... if you hold fast to the word which you also received, in which you also that I preached to you, unless stand, through which you are also being you have believed in vain. saved, ...

Gal 6:9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due time we will reap, ... if we do not give up.

Col 1:21-23 You ... he has now reconciled in ... if indeed you continue in the the body of his flesh through death, in order faith, grounded and steadfast, to present you holy and blameless and above and are not moved away from reproach before him, ... the hope of the gospel.

2 Tim 2:5 And if anyone competes, he is not ... unless he has competed crowned, ... according to the rules.

2 Tim 2:12-13 If we endure, ... we will also reign with him.
If we deny him, ... he also will deny us.
If we are faithless – ... he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

Heb 3:6 ... but Christ as a Son over his ... if indeed we hold firmly to house, whose house we are, ... the end the confidence and the boast of our hope.

2 Pet 1:10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure; ... for if you do these things, you will never stumble.

... I will give to eat of the tree
Rev 2:7 To the one who overcomes, ... of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Rev 2:11 The one ... will not be hurt by the second death. who overcomes ...

Rev 3:5 The one ... will be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. who overcomes ...

Warnings and promises that are tied to conditions of persevering and overcoming are not intended to fill us with fear and terror. Rather, like the indicative and the imperative of salvation, they are two sides of one and the same coin.

These conditions must not be set aside. Nor are we meant to be threatened by them with the idea that we could lose our salvation again. Blessings and conditions create a tension in which we are not to become slack and sluggish, but to make progress in faith, alert and focused on the goal.

8.2.2 Putting to Death the Deeds of the Body by the Spirit

We are uncompromisingly to deny the flesh every opportunity to develop. Life in the Spirit, victory over the flesh, is part of the normal Christian life that God wants. The flesh, the sinful nature, is still present in the believer and constantly tries to gain influence. Its sphere of influence and field of action is the body with all its senses, functions, and abilities. Of course it is not the body as such that is bad and must be put to death. Rather, the body is the playing field of the flesh; it is the tool of the flesh, of sin.

This flesh still deserves nothing but death, and it has already been judged at Golgotha (8:3). Here Paul does not give the command to put to death the flesh as such, but the deeds (impulses, practices, signs of life) of the flesh. I must take a stand against every impulse of my flesh. I must decide and take up a position. For this there is a God-given license to kill. If a sinful inclination wants to creep into my thoughts and spread, if the flesh wants to move me to a sinful emotion or action, then I must react wide awake and always show the same course of action. What is called for here is not passivity, but watchfulness and immediate reaction. “Putting to death” means tolerating nothing that comes from the flesh. This can also mean fleeing at once, for example from fleshly temptation.

But the battle is not my own; it is a battle in the power of a strong helper, namely the Spirit. Strictly speaking, this is not about a battle here, but about an “execution.” We do not have the flesh as a whole (as sinful nature and Adamic being) in our sights, but its deeds. These are a constant threat, but they only have to be “put to death” when they appear. The flesh is always there, but not the deed of the flesh. The term “execution” is not meant to gloss over anything, as though this confrontation were child’s play or a triumphant automatic process – with guaranteed success. Our everyday life never goes according to plan; it is hardly predictable and keeps confronting us with new challenges. In the same way the tricks and devices of our flesh always show that it attacks cleverly and by surprise. The friend of our flesh is the world, the evil age. This alliance does not make it easy for us. The flesh in us will not keep quiet and withdraw at the first blow. It will be back when we least expect it and can least use it.

The flesh is stubborn; it neither grows feeble with age nor gets tired. As far as the peculiar nature of the flesh is concerned, we must not cherish any illusions.

So it is not a battle in which we constantly wrestle the flesh to the ground. This battle has already taken place at Golgotha. In this victory and through the power of the Spirit we can put to death the deeds of the body. We may expect that (if we apply the consistency just described) we will over time no longer experience this enticement and assault of the flesh as a constant conflict. Through God’s working in us it will become a way of thinking and a habit to avoid evil, to give it no room, and automatically to choose the good, namely God’s will, as our own.

8.2.3 “Reckon Dead” or “Put to Death”?

In Romans 6:11 Paul had already said that we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. In 8:13, however, he speaks of putting to death. At first glance the two commands contradict each other. The first command is of a more passive kind, the second of a more active kind.

Romans 6:11 does not yet say everything about our victory over sin in our lives. The confrontation with sin and the flesh is not won by our reckoning ourselves dead to sin alone. If we try to escape enticement by “playing dead,”

because temptation, after all, cannot attack a dead person, then this may be a widespread view, but it is not the solution. The flesh still lives in me; I can declare it dead, but I will notice that it *is* not dead. That leads me into a strenuous conflict, which consists in my concentrating very much on myself and on the temptation to sin by constantly trying to reckon myself dead. That is *not* the answer of the Letter to the Romans to the problem of sin and the flesh. What does it mean to reckon oneself dead to sin? It is the acceptance of Christ's work of redemption, in which my old life, my old self, was crucified (put to death) with Christ. Reckoning oneself "dead to sin" has nothing to do with how I should behave when tempted by sin; rather, Romans 6 is about the believing acceptance of what God has done for me once for all. This happened outside of me 2,000 years ago. There God condemned the old life and brought it to an end in the death of Christ. I claim this saving act for myself in faith, 100%. Now I lead a new life in Christ. That is what we are to reckon ourselves to be; that is what we as believers are to assume from now on. The second part of the sentence ("but alive to God in Christ Jesus") describes what the Christian does: He lives in the power of the Spirit, as described in chapter 8. Only now, in Romans 8, does Paul set out what I should do in very practical terms with the sinful flesh, with its deeds and practices. Here passivity (reckoning oneself to be something) is not the order of the day; rather, consistent action is called for. It is in fact the most consistent thing imaginable: putting to death.

8.2.4 Putting to Death – How Does That Work?

What does "putting to death" look like? It is about the flesh no longer getting a chance in our new life. God has declared war on this flesh, and we are to follow this example, and that without compromise. Putting to death means first of all that you must clearly identify an action as a work of the flesh. I must be clear about what comes from the flesh. The Holy Spirit helps me, for he is not called the Holy Spirit for nothing. Let us remind ourselves again and again that everything we do – without exception – is determined either by the Spirit or by the flesh. The flesh is especially dangerous in activities for the Lord. The flesh also has a religious "streak"; it can be very pious. The flesh knows every disguise! That is why it is useful to ask yourself again and again: What is the origin of my deed?

The flesh wants to dominate and to make sure that its action is carried out and repeated. To this we now say quite clearly: “No.” We know the flesh; it is hostility toward God. Through the leading of the Spirit we say without compromise: “Stop!” There is no alternative to this. Either the flesh or the Spirit determines our actions. We do not allow the flesh to continue its action. So “putting to death” means condemning the fleshly action: Before it comes to the actual deed, I give a clear refusal to every intention of carrying it out. “Putting to death” can look different in different situations:

- Canceling
- turning away
- stopping
- confessing
- removing
- deciding
- fleeing
- leaving it alone
- keeping silent
- condemning
- walking away
- looking away
- willing
- destroying
- bearing witness

– and much more –

The OT provides a fitting example of how radically one must proceed against the enemy. Eglon, the king of the Moabites, was a fat, selfish man – the epitome of the sinful flesh. Ehud, the deliverer of Israel, strikes down this king with his sword in a daring operation that was protected by God (Judg 3:12-30).⁴⁴

If we do not put to death the deeds of the body, they will rule us. “Kill the snakes before they kill you.”⁴⁵

Paul describes the radical and unsparing strategy against everything that comes from the flesh just as clearly to the Colossians:

44. J. T. Mawson, *Überwinden ... aber wie?*, Schwelm, 1980, pp. 28-44.

45. Quotation from Jean Gibson.

“Put to death therefore your members that are on the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness (greed), which is idolatry.”

A little further on he continues this list: “... anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, obscene talk ...” (Col 3:5-11).

The Lord Jesus himself recommends the same strategy and puts it even more drastically: “Everyone who looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28). *“If your right eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better for you that one of your members perish than that your whole body be thrown into hell”* (Matt 5:29; cf. Mark 9:43-48).

In the conflict with the flesh it should be clear to us that we can put to death and root out the deeds of the body only in the light of Golgotha and through the power of the Holy Spirit. This will not happen by itself; rather, our daily decision is called for. We keep the right attitude toward the flesh only if we remind ourselves of the cross again and again (as we also do, after all, in the weekly memorial meal, the breaking of bread).

8.3 Verse 14: Sons of God Led by the Spirit

For all who are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

The leading of the Spirit shows itself first of all as just described in verse 13: It is victory over the flesh on the one hand, and on the other hand the fact that one produces the “fruit of the Spirit” as Paul describes it in Galatians 5.

Being led by God’s Spirit is *the* mark of sons of God. Sons are distinguished by the fact that they understand and do the will and the purpose of their father. In this Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was the perfect example. He did the works of the Father, and the will of the Father was like his food. The Spirit had a large part in this (Isa 11:2; Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1, 14, 18; Heb 9:14; etc.). So it happens also in believers, in whom the Spirit not only dwells but also takes the lead.

Here Paul is not describing special situations in life in which we would have special tasks to master or far-reaching decisions to make. As has been noted several times in these chapters of his letter, he is concerned with fundamental matters – with principles, with two lines that are clearly distinct from each other.

An unbeliever is led by the flesh, a believer by the Spirit. This in turn is not the automatic process of a robot that leads a believer effortlessly to sinlessness. It is the normal way of life of the Christian to be led by the Spirit from his renewed heart and thinking. But he is always in danger of following the flesh and being led by it. That is why these verses are a clear call to live actively and consciously in the power of this Spirit and to be aware of his presence, power, and help. It is the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of sonship. In other words: Those who are led by the Spirit also live as sons of God should live.

“The Spirit of God has access to every aspect of our lives and is therefore not a passive resident, but exerts an active power in order to lead God’s saints.”⁴⁶ Leading and guidance by God’s Spirit do not switch off the believer’s personality, so that he acts or feels as though he were remote-controlled or manipulated. The Spirit gives strength to do what God wants. As a person I always bear the responsibility for what I do and am therefore always the one who makes the decision. Thanks be to God that the Christian’s will is constantly being renewed (Rom 12:2; Col 3:10), so that he can recognize and do God’s will. The Spirit supports this thinking and acting. This usually happens without our noticing or perceiving it. Beyond that, there can be a special working of the Spirit for special challenges in our lives – through special circumstances, through the Spirit speaking to us, through brothers and sisters in the faith. The NT speaks of this rather rarely.

The leading of the Spirit is not mysticism (constantly listening to inner voices and impressions), nor does it involve a “situation ethics” in which we depend on new revelation or instruction in every situation. The leading of the Spirit strengthens our personality and its renewed thinking so that we recognize God’s will and do what is right and better. The Spirit’s leading moves above all within the framework of the biblical instructions and commandments. In this context of Romans 8 it is about victory over the flesh and sin.

Nevertheless: The Spirit not only gives strength; he is also our “scout,” our pathfinder, on the way to glory. Our problem is that he is invisible, and that is why we are to trust in his presence and his working (that is, in his leading).

46. Fred Stallan, *Was die Bibel lehrt* (What the Bible Teaches), Letter to the Romans, p. 230.

8.4 Verse 15: The Spirit of Sonship Cries Out in Us: “Dear Father!”

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a Spirit of sonship, by whom we cry: Abba, Father!

The new Father-son relationship is not a relationship of slavery. This recalls the experience of chapter 7. Under law one is in slavery. Fear of the master and fear of failure are now a thing of the past. The Spirit of sonship enables us to live in fellowship with the Father. This fellowship is marked by prayer and worship, for the exclamation found here (“Abba, Father”) is a prayer or an act of worship in probably the shortest possible form. This word “Abba” occurs only three times in the NT. In the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36) Jesus, the Son of God, addresses his Father in this way in the greatest anguish. It is the familiar form of address used toward a father, comparable to “Dear Father” or simply “Daddy.” Paul also uses a similar phrase in the letter to the Galatians (4:6). It is perhaps surprising to address the almighty God with this term of endearment, but it makes clear how warm this relationship of sons and children is.

Service for God is no longer a matter of fear and compulsion and the strict observance of commandments and prohibitions. Rather, it involves the life that is lived in a relationship not determined by anxiety and fear, and that springs from this relationship. This relationship is filled with the love of God and complete acceptance by the Father, and with the presence of his Spirit, who is actually in us, not as a silent observer but as an active helper. We are sons of God; we are accepted; we are led and guided by his Spirit. That is a fact! A false step, a sin, does not break the relationship; we remain sons and children. “After his forceful appeal to live out our faith in everyday life, Paul now wants to bring our hearts to rest. I don’t know how it is with you, but I need this encouragement. For the transcendent God of the universe is the one who, in the stillness of the night or when I have fallen into the dirt, takes my hand and invites me to call him ‘Daddy.’”⁴⁷

8.5 Verse 16: We Are Children of God!

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

47. Francis Schaeffer, *Allein durch Christus*, p. 216.

The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we have really been brought into a child's relationship with God. What is meant here is not a voice calling something out to our spirit. Rather, it is about what strengthens and confirms the conviction, the assurance of salvation, that we have already gained through the Word of God.

It is God's will that our firm relationship with the Father should be present in our thoughts every day. It is of decisive importance for every area of my life that I know I am unconditionally accepted in Christ by a loving Father. The Father loves me, and I am so precious to him that he gave his Son as a sacrifice for me. Of course he also disciplines me, which is a proof of his love (Heb 12:5). The right to be a child (John 1:12) naturally also brings duties with it. Let us never forget who we are now! The Holy Spirit helps us with this every day.

8.6 Verse 17: We Are Heirs of Christ's Glory

But if children, then also heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, so that we may also be glorified with him.

It is not only the joy of a relationship with God that we may feel and experience. We are also children in the "legal sense," that is, we are heirs as well. God is absolutely serious about our being his children and about his position as Father. What belongs to God and what he will give to his Son is our inheritance too.

Sufferings are not the condition for receiving the inheritance on the day of glory. For most Christians, sufferings for Christ's sake are a constant companion. They should not be anything strange to us, for Jesus went ahead of us on this path of the sufferings he bore for the sake of righteousness. In Germany and all Western countries we have so far been spared these sufferings, in stark contrast to our brothers and sisters in the faith in other countries. If a time of suffering should still come upon us, then this holds true: Let us remember this word, written by someone who wanted to become like Christ in everything, even in his death. Through suffering to glory – this was mostly the path of faithful believers in church history.

"Already" we are children of God and therefore heirs. We have "not yet" come into the inheritance. The indicative of salvation describes our being God's children; the imperative of salvation includes the sufferings, which are not a

precondition for receiving the inheritance but are often an unavoidable part of following Jesus. This too is not a warning that points to a final failure. Rather, we are called to be confessors who stand faithfully by Jesus.

9. Romans 12: The Mind Is Renewed!

The letter to the Romans could be called the mighty cathedral of the gospel and of God's righteousness. The gospel brings God's salvation: acquittal, justification, liberation, being made one with Christ, and preservation to the end through all difficulties, sufferings, and hostility!

In order to serve God, human beings had to be set free from the guilt and the power of sin, but they also had to receive the strength for a new life. Paul described this impressively in chapter 8. The world around us and our body too have not yet changed, but that is only a question of time. God's promise to transform our bodies is a settled matter, which he will fulfill at a time known only to him. Until then God stands on our side: If he is for us, who can dare to be against us?

Then, from chapter 9 to 11, Paul deals with other questions that also have to do with God's righteousness. In chapter 12 he comes back to our service for God, for which we have been set free. Here it is once again about our personal life, which we can lead in newness and by the Spirit. Now the righteousness of God, which was revealed in salvation, is to become visible in everyday life as well. In chapters 5 to 8 Paul had spoken in relatively abstract terms and in principle. He laid the foundation and explained the teaching. Now he shows what newness looks like in the details of life. He does this by means of exhortations, imperatives, appeals – the commandments of the NT. These have not taken the place of the Mosaic law. First of all, these words serve to show us what the new life looks like in the first place. They are signposts of God's love. We do not live by these commandments in order to become righteous, but because we are righteous! These commandments are an expression of who God is and who Jesus Christ is. In the end, the more than 1,000 commandments of the NT describe the truth that is in Jesus. His life in us displays exactly those characteristics that are described in the commandments of the NT. Now Christ is in us and the Spirit is in us, so that we can live in this way. We are obligated to walk as he walked (1 John 2:6, 8).

9.1 God's Goal for Us

God's goal for each of us is to make us like his Son. All other goals are subordinate to this goal. One day this will be absolutely the case. When we have reached the goal, we will not freeze into this image, into the likeness of Christ; we will not become monuments. No, we will be active people – for all time. We will think, act, speak, and love like the Son of God. And we will always remain the very people we have been since our birth as personalities created by God. But then we will have reached our destiny and will live in it forever. We will be the people we were always meant to be. That is our greatest happiness. God's joy consists in giving us this as a gift. Through it his Son is honored. Even now we can be the people we always wanted to be. If Christ is in us, then self-determination includes the fact that *he* lives through us!

The transformation into the image of Jesus, or the corresponding conforming to him, began on day zero of our life as born-again people. It is the life program of Christians. It is about preparing for eternity. That is why this life is so important, and so is what we make of it – or better, what Christ can make of it.

9.2 Romans 12:1-2: Worship – a Logical Matter!

I exhort you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living, holy sacrifice, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service (worship). And do not be conformed to this world (this age), but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God is.

This is a direct reference back to chapter 6. We are to present our body as instruments of righteousness (place it at his disposal). Now Paul goes even further and calls on the Romans (indeed, on all Christians) to give their bodies completely to the service of God, like a sacrifice. In contrast to the animal sacrifices of the OT, this sacrifice is living. So it is offered continually and not just once, because we walk in the newness of eternal *life*. Our sacrifice is holy because we are already people sanctified by God. That is why it is a well-pleasing sacrifice. An attitude to life of complete devotion is the logical consequence of the salvation we have received. That is why Paul calls for this

devotion by the mercies of God. We are not called by means of a law to place our existence at God's disposal, but by God's mercies. In concrete terms these were expressed as follows: Everything we had incurred as guilt and everything we are (namely, people sold under sin) he laid on Christ. He did not spare his Son! God's mercy not only created our salvation; it also remains constantly present, because he is our Father and we are his children.

The fact that Paul is giving a brotherly and loving *exhortation* here should not be overlooked. For every Christian (regardless of whether he is at the beginning of the path of faith or has been on it for a long time), this claim to complete devotion is challenging and relevant again and again. We are to say yes to it again and again. Every honest Christian will find that the devotion of his life is unfortunately subject to fluctuations. Devotion is a process that has to do with our thinking. That is where the decision is made whether we are willing to devote ourselves and how far we will go with it. A daily reminder of this is a helpful thing.

9.2.1 Your Bodies!

Whoever offers the body as a living sacrifice does not distinguish himself by an "extreme heroic deed," such as was expected of the pagans toward their pagan gods,⁴⁸ but leads a normal, unspectacular life that is constantly oriented toward God. That such a life with God knows highs and lows, victories and defeats, stumbling and getting up again, is beyond question. But there are wonderfully encouraging experiences and fruit. When we hand our life over to God and so walk holding the hand of the eternal but invisible God, our life will become exciting.

But why does Paul speak of the "body" that is to be sacrificed? Doesn't our thinking (as in verse 2) belong to it as well? Of course, it is about the devotion of our entire existence, our whole life. But that finds its expression precisely through our body. The body is the interface with the world in which we live. And before our salvation this body was the "body of sin" (Rom 6:6). It was the instrument through which sin got hands and feet. The body developed sinful habits, led a sinful life of its own, and demanded obedience. Let us examine how often, or how many areas of our life, are determined or influenced by our

48. Fred Stallan, *Was die Bibel lehrt, Römerbrief*, Dillenburger 2001, p. 358.

body. Just a few examples will show that we can easily underestimate the role of our body in our devotion. It is about habits, or about the question of how, how much, when, and what we eat and drink, about sleeping habits, and about our television and internet behavior. All these aspects have an influence on our body and become fixed as internalized patterns of behavior. It is not about a “catalog of sins,” but about seeing the role and the often underestimated influence of our body in the right light. The body is sacrificed here, that is, the demands of our body are given up, so that instead it can be placed at God’s disposal.

First we are to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). This word too emphasizes the role of the body, but it is indeed a “hostile” one, because the body wants to do things that we are to put to death. To use another word of Paul’s, these are the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19), or the members that are on the earth (Col 3:5). Once sinful habits have been brought under control by the power of the Holy Spirit, the way is clear to place this body more and more at God’s disposal. The “body of sin” was not crucified, for then we would be dead. Rather, it was rendered ineffective at Golgotha. What was once the body of sin is now the “body of righteousness”! Paul brings his body into bondage (1 Cor 9:27). He turns the tables, so that the body now has to follow him. The body is not to be able to get its way with its sinful desires and an all too great love of comfort: The body must belong to God and become an instrument of righteousness.

9.2.2 The World: Friend or Foe?

With our body we live in the world. Society (which is exactly what Paul means by the *world*) has largely declared the body to be the most important thing. Entire branches of industry offer everything the body needs or ought to need: wellness, fitness, sports, health, aesthetics, long life, good food and drink, medicine, cosmetic surgery. In principle there is nothing to object to in such things, as long as they are placed under God’s rule. The question is what role we give to the body. Is it servant or master?

A concrete danger that can keep us from complete devotion lurks in the world in which we live. It is the human world that surrounds us and in which we move (although, as Jesus says, like him we are not of it). People have arranged

their lives without God. Society, the economy and commerce, industry, culture, religion, music, philosophy, leisure, entertainment, food, education, family life, ethics – everything that makes up life is infected and shaped by forgetfulness of God: Human beings do not want to have God in the boat (Rom 1:28).

To our flesh the world is appealing and attractive. After all, we come from the world; our flesh was at home there. Now we are to take care not to live like the world (that is, like the people of the world). The world's way of life stands in clear contrast to the complete devotion of a living sacrifice! The people of the world live for themselves and do not ask about God's will for their lives!

World (Gr. *aion*) is also translated as “age.” The time of the world is running out. This world age is on the verge of coming to an end: We are living “in the last days.” In addition, the world is developing in the wrong direction – and at increasing speed. It is heading into remoteness from God, away from God, not toward him. Seen as a whole, this age is like the “broad road” (Matt 7:13-14) that leads down to destruction. This age is like a river in which the dead fish drift with the current. The living fish swims in the opposite direction; and that is exactly what it means not to take on the form (the pattern⁴⁹) of the world. *World* is also translated as “spirit of the age.” The mental orientation or attitude of human beings is what makes the world what it is. Moreover, the Bible speaks several times and clearly of the fact that Satan himself is the god of the world, the prince of this age.

The world and its spirit (of the age) are evil. God's word leaves no doubt about that (Gal 1:4). And whoever wants to be a “friend of the world” (because a life of conformity is more comfortable) makes himself an enemy of God (Jas 4:4). Certainly there is a scale of how far worldliness can go. It does not have to have taken hold of one's whole life. Perhaps it concerns only one area or another, a large or only a small area of life that is shaped by the world. That is why we should examine ourselves to see where a worldly way of thinking and living has crept in. How do things stand with my money? How do things stand with my possessions, my career goals, my behavior in marriage, my favorite habits, my friendships?

Not being conformed to the world, not being adapted to it, does not begin with outward things but first of all with our thinking. The thought comes

49. Gr. *schematizein*, that is, to shape oneself according to a pattern or to let oneself be formed according to a given form.

before the deed, just as thoughts precede conformity to the world.

9.2.3 Transformation through New Thinking

God wants to change us. He wants us to become what we are! Christ is to take shape in us more and more. Christ is to increase, but we ourselves are to decrease. Living like the world (in its way of thinking and also in its outward appearance) is exactly the opposite of what God wants to achieve. How can this happen? On the basis of what has already been explained in chapters 5 to 8, a gradual change now takes place, a process of spiritual growth and sanctification. A person who has just come to faith still has his old and familiar patterns of thinking. These are not deleted at the press of a button. Through the process of renewal they are exchanged for a way of thinking shaped by God.

Paul addresses the ongoing process of renewal several times. More is meant than the mere process of thinking:

- 2 Cor 4:16: the daily renewal of the inner person in the tension between suffering and glory
- Eph 4:23: Be continually renewed in your thinking.
- Col 3:10: The new self is constantly being renewed.

Transformation starts with our thinking. The mind (Gr. *nous*) includes the world of our thoughts, the intellect, thinking, understanding, the thinking center. Behind the term “mind” lies more than mere thinking, reason. The heart, which in the Bible likewise stands for thinking and will (sometimes also for feeling), cannot be separated from the concept of the mind. The mind is the control center for thinking, willing, and acting. In this control center the processes of classifying, evaluating, and discovering thought, as well as of deciding, take place. Action is the result of thinking and deciding. “The mind is ... the place where the process of knowing takes place and from which our thoughts come. It is, in the literal sense, the ‘decisive’ place for our actions and thus for practical ethics as a whole.”⁵⁰

50. Jürg Buchegger, *Ein Mensch, was ist das?*, Wuppertal, 2004, p. 211.

9.2.4 Metamorphosis

This is the word that stands for “transformation” in the Greek text. The renewal of the mind brings about the transformation. The term metamorphosis is helpful in the context of our subject. We know this word from the animal world. We know that a butterfly goes through one of the most astonishing processes of transformation. From a crawling caterpillar (which does not always look pretty), a flying butterfly develops by way of a pupal stage. This is a programmed process that takes time but cannot be stopped. It is astonishing that we too are meant to and can go through such a radical transformation. This shows that change as God wants it is always possible. Nothing is excluded from it. The excuse that this or that is the way it is and will stay that way does not hold when you consider that an ugly caterpillar can become a beautiful butterfly. The insect remains an insect; it remains the same living creature. Yet it is totally changed. Isn't this like the power of the gospel, which can change a person truly and profoundly (in his heart and in his thinking)?

The same word “metamorphosis” is used when Jesus is transformed before the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration and takes on the radiance of God's glory. In another context the same word is used with reference to us: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). The goal of our “metamorphosis” is the example of Christ. This goal of God's cannot be emphasized and repeated enough. It is not a pipe dream and not an unattainable goal, not a new illusion with which God wants to frustrate us. It is his plan and will, in which he takes great joy and which he wants to pass on to us. That is why it will succeed. If we are willing and look at Jesus Christ (occupy ourselves with him and with his word and his kingdom), have him as our goal, if he truly fills our life, then the process of transformation is programmed correctly.

9.2.5 Why Renewal?

From birth, by nature, we have a way of thinking and a mind that has not God but itself as its center. When a person turns around, God creates

something new in him; the seed of the word springs up in his heart; Christ is now his life. This life must now grow, as is the case with a baby. This growth concerns the inner person, and the mind is included in that. This process of renewal lasts all of life. The growth takes place on the basis of the new being in Christ. In Christ we are righteous and holy before God in a moment. This is not meant to remain merely an expression of our standing, but to permeate our daily life. For this a constant renewal is needed, which is brought about by God himself and which takes full account of the situation in which we find ourselves, the surroundings in which we live, and our own makeup (character, temperament, gifts, weaknesses, our life situation, etc.), and is adapted to these circumstances.

9.2.6 How Does Renewal Happen?

It happens through God himself. The transformation is a command that we are to let happen to us. Renewal is God's work. We cannot bring it about. Our task is to hand over our whole existence to God and not to be conformed to the world. That is our contribution to this process of renewal. If we occupy ourselves too much with the world, let worldly ways of thinking into our control center for thinking, willing, and acting, and adapt ourselves, then we too will be changed and (slowly but surely) show conformity to the world. This happens inwardly and then, as an inevitable consequence, outwardly as well. This process often runs its course gradually, almost unnoticed. The poison of the world slowly kills off the spiritual life, so that one hardly notices the process.

Over against this stands a life in "God's world," in his kingdom, in fellowship with God, where I let my thinking be filled, ordered, and directed by him. In this case too I do not necessarily perceive the process of renewal myself.

By what means does renewal happen? That is not spoken of here. It is God's sovereign action. He uses the word of God, read directly or heard in preaching. He uses stillness, prayer, and worship, the conscious acceptance of renewal and correction. He uses the fellowship of believers. He makes use of every situation in life, every experience. Everything is the Father's upbringing, training, and instruction. So I can push forward and support this renewal, but I can just as well hinder it. I can decide to become more conformed to the world, just as I

can become more like Jesus. We face this decision not just once, but ultimately every day.

9.2.7 The Battlefield of Our Thoughts

“I think, therefore I am!” Our thoughts are the cipher, or the code, of our life. To influence them or even to steer them is the greatest goal of God’s enemy. Whoever controls the control center has everything in his hands. This too need not necessarily affect all areas of life, but it can have a far-reaching influence on our behavior. The devil can manage to erect strongholds in the world of our thoughts, either with one big step or over a longer period with many small steps (2 Cor 10:3-5):

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but divinely powerful for the destruction of strongholds (bulwarks), as we destroy arguments and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

“The first targets that must be destroyed are the ‘strongholds’ in our heads. The actual meaning of the Greek word used here is ‘bulwark.’ Bulwarks are negative patterns of thinking that have been burned into our brains either through constant repetition or through a traumatic event.”⁵¹

Patterns of thinking and habitual behaviors or reactions arise, among other things, through outside influences: “These environmental influences were each brief, but lasting. They include, for example, certain events, places, and encounters, as well as personal experiences. In addition, we were shaped by the books we read, the films we saw, the music we like to listen to ... We have developed a method – which may (or may not) correspond to God’s will – of how we process these things and how we resolve the conflicts they have caused. Lasting influences in your life come from long-term relationships with your surroundings, such as the influence of family, friends and acquaintances, neighbors, teachers, coworkers.

At your spiritual new birth all your sins were washed away, but your previous patterns of thinking and behavior, which resulted from adapting to your environment, remained rooted in your flesh. One can actually be born again

51. Neil T. Anderson, *Neues Leben – neue Identität*, 1994, Lage, p. 153.

and still go on cultivating one's previous 'atheistic' lifestyle (this applies just as much to those who grew up in a Christian environment; author's note). That is why Paul earnestly urges us to be changed through the renewal of our mind (Rom 12:2)."⁵²

Everything we have become accustomed to and have learned can be changed through the renewal that God himself wants to carry out in our thinking and living, if we allow it. There are weapons from God that help us to change the (partly) fleshly programming of our thinking.

9.2.8 How Can We Win the Battle?

First of all we need the basic attitude mentioned above of devotion toward God – and of rejection toward the world. The Bible gives further pointers:

- letting ourselves be filled with God's word through (regular) Bible reading
- letting the peace of Christ rule (Col 3:15)
- letting the word of Christ dwell richly in us (Col 3:16).

The bulwarks and arguments are mostly Satan's lies. To expose the lies, we use the weapons of light and of righteousness. When a thought or a pattern of thought arises, when a bulwark opens its sally gates, then the urgent appeal is aimed at taking this thought captive at once to the obedience of Christ. Christ is stronger. He is the victor.

Examples of bulwarks of lies:

- fear and delusions
- fears about the future and fears of failure
- inferiority complexes and problems with self-esteem
- lack of peace and nervousness
- temptations in our thoughts
- obsessions
- dependence on people, objects, things, goods, possessions, human securities, and lusts.

We must expose all these lies and take them captive under the authority of Christ. In many cases the answer is that we are secure in Christ and are God's

52. Neil T. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

beloved children forever, and that we know of God's care. Sin no longer has any right to oppress and torment us. Christ has set us free.

9.2.9 Daydreams and Wishful Thinking

The ability of human thinking is impressive. In your thoughts you can go traveling without paying a cent for it. You can build yourself a parallel world in which you fulfill the wishes that were denied you in real life: You can be a star, win the lottery, and have a perfect family, a different wife or a different husband; all this and much more is possible in your thoughts. But let us be careful! These thoughts not only steal time, but deceive us with a world that does not exist. These dreams and wishes, once they harden into habits, will influence our thinking and deciding. We ourselves are the pivot and center of these dreams! It is dangerous to imagine actions that take place only in a dream world. You lose touch with reality.

"The human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind."⁵³ American researchers came to an astonishing result in a study. According to it, people are mentally absent half the time. They hang on to their thoughts, brood over this and that, or simply daydream. The problem: Mental wandering apparently makes people unhappy. Even if this finding is not always true, it gives us food for thought in that the enemy of our souls can do damage in this way.

What do we do about it? A few tips that help us to resist the gravity and momentum of our world of thoughts:

- In general and always the following applies: Let us concentrate on what we are doing now, that is, on the moment, so that we carry out our tasks and obligations well!

When we are free to do what we want:

- Let us pray for everything that comes to mind! Let us turn everything into a prayer!
- Let us read the Bible or a spiritually valuable book!
- Let us learn Bible verses by heart, so that we can reflect on God's words even without a Bible in our hands! Perhaps we will yet experience a time

53. Author unknown.

without a Bible!

- Let us think about how we can do a service for the Lord Jesus today!
- Let us think about the Lord Jesus, about an incident from the Gospels that we remember!
- Let us get up and do something active! Let us move, let us do something!
- Let us seek out a conversation! Let us call someone and ask how he is doing!

9.2.10 The Will of God – Tested and Approved!

... so that you may prove what the good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God is.

God's will stands in contrast to the age of the world. This age (the people of the world) does not much care what God wants. But that is playing with fire – in the truest sense of the word. John puts it like this (1 John 2:15-17):

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; for everything that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and its lust; but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

The world is subject to an expiration date. And whoever looks closely sees that it has all but run out. The world that human beings built for themselves is doomed to destruction. There is nothing about it and nothing in it that would justify an extension of the deadline. The smell of death clings to it. And it seems that today there are Christians who no longer notice the corresponding stench of decay.

Only God himself is good and perfect, which also applies to his will, which moreover is well pleasing. This is reminiscent of the sacrifices of the OT, which had to be without blemish and faultless. Only these were allowed to be offered. In the same way, with the knowledge of God's will in every situation of life, our whole existence in the body (which includes the inner person as well) is to be offered to God. The constant renewal of our mind makes it possible to know God's will. Checklists and good advice may be helpful, but God also wants to create in our thinking the conditions for recognizing his will.

9.3 Romans 13:13-14: Putting On Christ – No Provision for the Flesh

Let us walk decently, as in the daytime; not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in strife and envy (jealousy); but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Before we finish our study of the letter to the Romans, let us look at this passage too, because it is the only one after chapter 8 that mentions the “flesh.”

God’s goal for us remains in place until our last day: He wants to transform us into the image of his Son. It is not about a copy of Jesus’ life; we are not supposed to become carpenters. Rather, it is about taking on the nature of Jesus more and more in our life, in keeping with our individual personality. That includes his love, his truth, his righteousness – ultimately everything we can recognize in him in terms of moral traits. He has already given us the new life; now we must give it room to unfold, and let the Lord become great in our life while we ourselves step back.

This word calls on us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ like a garment. This is indeed a strong metaphor, which is not described any further. In the night of the godless world, sin takes place in every variety, and people are not even shy of the public eye. Over against this stands the all-decisive will of God. What is to be seen in us is not the flesh, by our giving in to its desires, but Jesus Christ.

Here too it is pointed out that a great deal can happen and be allowed in our thoughts before the desire is actually gratified and one has succumbed to temptation. The flesh must not be cared for or cultivated. The Schlachter translates unmistakably: “Do not cultivate the flesh to the point of arousing desires” (Schl 2000, German Bible translation). We are to put to death the thoughts and deeds of the flesh! It takes an uncompromising attitude, which Paul described in detail in Romans 8. “The desire for a pleasant, conflict-free life can tempt us to avoid important decisions and consequences in order to spare our flesh. But in doing so we will inevitably cultivate it, and it can bear fruit unhindered. If the flesh is cherished and cultivated, it will set up its dictatorship in our life. If it is spared through inconsistency and its craving is satisfied, it will become ever hungrier and more passionate. Cultivating the flesh does not serve (as is so often claimed today) self-acceptance and personal

development, but arouses desires that are opposed to God's thoughts."⁵⁴

9.4 Conclusion

Whoever offers body and life on God's altar loses his life, his self-life. But what does the Lord Jesus say, in essence? "Whoever loses his self-life will gain it" (cf. Luke 9:24; 17:33). Jim Elliot wrote: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."⁵⁵

If we are willing, God will go on reshaping our thinking. We will then come to the point where, as doers of *God's* will, it seems to us as though we were doing *our own* will. That is the law of liberty (Jas 1:25; 2:12): to want, freely and from the heart, what God wants. This is the only life that is worthwhile. But whoever does the will of God abides forever!

54. Walter Nitsche, *Versagen und innere Zerrissenheit*, p. 76.

55. The wording in the original is as follows: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

10. The Old and the New – an Overview

Old	New	References
The old has gone	The new has come	2 Cor 5:17
In Adam	In Christ	Rom 5:12 – 8:11, etc.
Sinners	Righteous	Rom 5:19
The old self	The new self	Rom 6:6; Eph 4:20-24; Col 3:9-11
The body of sin	Offering our body and our members to God	Rom 6:6, 12-23; 8:13; 12:1-2
In the flesh	In the Spirit	Rom 8:8-9
Law of sin and of death	Law of the Spirit of life	Rom 8:2
Flesh (in us)	Holy Spirit (in us)	Rom 8:1-11; Gal 5
Sin – dominated by it, sold under it	Died to sin: newness of life; “alive from the dead”	Rom 6 (and Rom 8)
Spiritual death	New spiritual life, made alive	1 Cor 15:45; 1 John 3:14; Eph 2:5; etc.
Flesh (profits nothing; the person concerned cannot fulfill God’s law)	Born again	John 3; 6:63; Rom 8:7
In the end: death	At the goal: eternal life	Rom 6:21-23
Dying	Renewal	Rom 6:21; Eph 4:22-24

Earthly – members that are on the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, anger, rage, malice, etc.	Heavenly – Col 3:1-11; 1 calling, goal Cor 15:48-49
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Filled with ourselves: Nothing good dwells in us as long as Christ is not in us.	Col 3:11; Gal Christ in us 2:19-20; etc. Rom 7:18
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11. What Is the Flesh?

Among Christians the *flesh* is often referred to as “the old nature,” in contrast to the “new nature” that we received in the new birth. Other descriptions are: *Adamic nature*, *sin nature*, *fleshly nature*, *human* or *self-glorifying*, *sinful*, *old*, or also *earthly nature*. Even though these terms are helpful, the NT always calls it “flesh.”

“Flesh” means the imprint that sin has left on human beings, as it is anchored in their physical and psychological existence.⁵⁶

The word *flesh* occurs with various meanings. In most cases it is about human beings. The sense of the word must be clarified in each particular context. It may concern the moral aspect or the creaturely and material aspect of human flesh, or its transient (Isa 40:6-8), helpless (Jer 17:5, 7), or weak aspect; it may concern the marriage union (Gen 2:24; 1 Cor 6:16), family kinship (Rom 1:3; 9:3), or humanity as a whole (Rom 3:20). Paul uses the word a total of 78 times (63 of them in the letters to the Romans and Galatians) as a designation for fallen and sinful human nature.

So Paul uses the term “flesh” in a moral sense. In this meaning it is likewise used by Peter (1 Pet 2:11; 2 Pet 2:10, 18) and John (1 John 2:16). James speaks of desire (Jas 4:1-3).

The term “flesh” – in contrast to “Spirit” – is of central importance for the theme of “changing sides.” When it comes to the conflict in the Christian life, the core statement is Paul’s observation:

“The flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other” (Gal 5:17).

In the life of the Christian, it is not two parties that stand against each other, such as are present to a greater or lesser degree in every human being. It is not simply about the struggle between bad and good that takes place to a greater or lesser degree in every person. Here it is about another dimension: The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, God himself, who has moved into the flesh-dominated life of a person who has come to faith. The flesh is that component of being human

56. Roland Antholzer, Gemeindeorientierte Initiative für biblische Beratung e.V. (GIBB).

that is still left over in the Christian, after his new birth, from the old life in Adam.

In everyday life the word *flesh* is used when it comes to the butcher and to food, and also in anatomy when it comes to human tissue. Both correspond to the use of the word in the Bible. Often it simply means the human body (e.g., Rom 2:28). But the meaning of the word goes beyond mere material substance. The flesh (the human being in his earthly existence) is not only weak, frail, and transient. Rather, through sin it has taken on traits that are opposed to the nature of God. The meaning of the flesh, as Paul uses it in Romans 7 and 8 and elsewhere, does not describe the material aspect of the human being, but his moral and ethical aspect. Flesh therefore means the frailty of human existence and the fallenness of human nature. “The flesh is human nature as it has become through sin.”⁵⁷

The moral and ethical aspect describes *what* a person is like: What is his motivation, what are his goals, how does he behave toward God, how toward his fellow human beings? It is about his nature, his character, his makeup in moral terms, measured against God’s being and nature. The flesh (that is, the nature and the direction of life of a human being) is not turned toward the true God, although it can be religious. The Lord Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that a new birth is necessary, because what is born of the flesh is flesh (John 3:5-8). Because the flesh profits nothing in relation to God (John 6:63), a birth from God, from the Spirit, is necessary in order to create something new.

11.1 Sin and the Flesh

Sin is a principle that is directed against God and rejects his monopoly of authority. This principle already existed when there was as yet no “flesh” in the sense of created human beings, of creatures of flesh and blood. The devil, perhaps the highest created spirit being, followed this principle by misusing his freedom. Adam, the first human being, opened the door to sin by transgressing a simple commandment. With that, sin had entered into human beings, right into their deepest nature and being (into their heart). Since then sin dwells in every human being (Rom 7:17); he is a *sinner*. Adam passed on his nature to all his descendants. So we became sinners by birth.

57. William Barclay, *Fleisch oder Geist* (Flesh and Spirit), Augsburg, 1968, p. 19.

The flesh is the human being, his nature, his individual personality, which is determined by the indwelling sin. Paul puts this in a nutshell when he says: “I ... am of the flesh, sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). Sin is the master and slave driver here, the flesh (that is, the human being) its servant. Sin and flesh are closely interwoven, almost interchangeable.

The flesh is not only a principle of rebellion against God (as sin is), but also means every human being without Christ in his individuality. The flesh is the combination of the peculiarities of personality and character. In moral terms the flesh is the instrument of sin. My flesh, that is, my body, is enslaved by sin. Sins are committed through the body (that is, with hands, feet, and tongue). So the body is not merely a neutral instrument, but is also marked by sinful habits, desires, and lusts.

11.2 The Flesh and the Unbeliever

Nowhere can anything positive be attributed to the “flesh.” From God’s point of view the flesh is incorrigible. A first hint of this meaning of the flesh, which is unfolded in detail only in the NT, is God’s statement about humankind shortly before the flood: “And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth” (Gen 6:12; see also verse 3).

The unbeliever is “according to the flesh” and “in the flesh” (Rom 8:5-8). In view of God’s holiness and righteousness, his whole existence is nothing but “flesh,” that is, nothing other than a sinful being determined by his own thinking, his desires (unlawful wishes), and his drives. The unbeliever is not called fleshly. This term is used only for Christians who follow the old nature, although through the indwelling Spirit they ought actually to live spiritually (1 Cor 3:1).

The person who is far from Christ looks at what is before his eyes (that is, visible). The nations (who get entangled in the “cares ... of life”⁵⁸) strive after earthly, this-worldly things, putting everything into them without realizing that God is the giver of all things (Matt 6:32). In this sense the flesh is oriented toward this world and directed toward what is visible. It clings to the visible – to what seems to be secure. This too is a characteristic of the flesh that is not recognized as such at first glance, since we often regard *anxious worry* about our existence positively as a sense of responsibility taken seriously.

58. Cf. Luke 8:14.

11.3 The Flesh and the Christian

The Christian is no longer “in the flesh”; he is “in Christ” and “in the Spirit.” But the flesh is still present in us, though no longer in the position in which it is allowed to determine our thinking and doing. It remains the mortal enemy of the Holy Spirit and thus of the Christian. It even still has the possibility of being able to determine and characterize the life of a Christian if we do not accept what God has done for us and do not ourselves apply the death sentence to the deeds of the flesh (Rom 8:13). In Jesus, God condemned and crucified sin and the flesh. We have accepted this by faith, and this is how we regard the flesh in us. Nevertheless, it is still in us, unchanged in its nature. The many emphatic exhortations to deal consistently with the lust of the flesh (namely, to give the flesh no room) presuppose that this flesh is still in us.

Jesus testified to Nicodemus about the uselessness and incapacity of the flesh. “Again Jesus comes to speak of the heart of the problem and shows the total impossibility of making the flesh spiritual. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and it will never be anything else. It may be well-educated flesh, cultured flesh, flesh with great experience of life, morally good flesh, yes, even religious flesh, and still it remains flesh.”⁵⁹

“The flesh remains sinful! Have we quite consciously come to terms with the fact that in our earthly state we possess a ‘flesh’ that still has the desire to resist God’s law and gladly offers itself as an instrument for sin? Are we prepared for that?”⁶⁰

Yet we must not already call the mere presence of the flesh and its signs of life sin. Sin happens when we give in to the flesh and let the impulses and works of the flesh run their course instead of putting them to death. Over time we will recognize more and more the total and unchangeable wickedness of our flesh, without living according to the flesh. The flesh is like a beast, an octopus with many tentacles. The more spiritual understanding comes into our life, the more clearly we become aware of the total depravity of our own flesh. This self-knowledge should grow, in parallel with the knowledge of the grace and love in which Christ died for us. Whoever is disappointed by the wickedness

59. Ruth Paxson, *Life on the Highest Plane*, p. 190.

60. Walter Nitsche, *Versagen und innere Zerrissenheit*, p. 11.

and corruption of his flesh has not yet understood that nothing can be expected of the flesh and that it is incorrigible.

God has decided not to take the flesh away from us. The presence and aggressiveness of the flesh in the believer is evidently necessary for spiritual growth:

- It reveals our inner weakness.⁶¹
- It kills our pride and our arrogance.
- It humbles us again and again.
- It constantly drives us to call on God for help.
- It shows us the uselessness of human effort.
- It teaches us to trust in the Lord alone.
- It leads us to love the Savior who rescued us from sin.
- It brings us to a life of constant repentance.
- It makes us watchful against the encroachments of sin.
- It fosters a longing for heaven.
- It drives us to make use of all the means of divine grace.
- It encourages us to develop holy (or good and spiritual) habits.
- It drives us to make use of the help of our brothers and sisters.

The flesh causes us to look for solutions every day, and in the light of what God tells us about it in his word. We are not to wait for a sudden miracle. God does not simply “conjure away” the problems that have to do with our flesh, because we are to act and are able to act, since he has given us what we need for a victorious life.

We will go into this more deeply in the following chapter in particular. In doing so there will be repetitions more than once. This also applies to the chapters after it. Ultimately all the chapters deal with one theme, but from different angles. But since it is *one* theme – changing sides from Adam to Christ – in working out one angle we will again deal with various matters with which we have already concerned ourselves. One angle draws on the other angles or aspects. One aspect cannot be explained in isolation from the others.

61. <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2001-08-26-Full-Speed-Ahead-One-Step-at-a-Time-How-You-Can-Walk-in-the-Spirit-Every-Day/>

12. Flesh against Spirit

The flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other.

Gal 5:17

The Galatians had experienced impressively what the gospel brought about: They were justified and received the Spirit, who confirmed with signs and wonders that God himself was the source of the glorious message of the gospel. But what had happened? Judaizers, who became active as teachers of the law, followed after Paul and tried to introduce the Mosaic law into the newly founded churches. They presented the law as necessary for salvation and for life, and Jewish Christians in particular will probably have responded positively to this. That is the reason for the letter to the Galatians, in which Paul takes strong action against it: The foundations of the gospel are being tampered with when the law is mixed in with the gospel. With the law and the gospel, two incompatible worlds collide.

12.1 What Was the Problem?

With the reintroduction of the law, the Galatians fell back into the time of the law and thus also of the fleshly life. They took refuge in the law, claiming that it was necessary for salvation and as the standard for life. They probably also defended this opinion over against Paul. But the apostle makes it clear to them that they will not be saved this way. Furthermore (and this concerns our main theme) it turned out that they could not keep the law. They behaved toward one another like predators that as it were scratch out each other's eyes and devour one another. Paul says, a little ironically, that they should watch out that they do not eat each other up. In this way he pillories the fact that their love of the law and their supposed faithfulness to the law were counterproductive. Nothing good came of it. The Galatians had forgotten that the time of the law, and thus of the flesh, was over. The old system had been abolished. Now the age of the Spirit and of freedom had dawned.

The flesh (the old fallen Adamic nature) needs the law and its commandments and prohibitions. But it is and remains powerless: It is not the

law but the human being that has failed. What does Paul set against this? The Spirit of God. The letter is an impressive plea for the Spirit of God as the replacement for the Torah! The Spirit of God, whom Christ has sent, is sufficient for everything! By him we live and walk, says Paul. Christ is the center, the foundation of our justification; the Spirit is the one through whom we live and put on the nature of Christ. But lawlessness is not the goal; the law of Christ now becomes reality in our everyday life through the Spirit of God.

12.2 The Working of the Flesh

The allusion to the wild animals gives us a glimpse of what our flesh is like. The flesh is like a big cat, always out for prey and dominance. In the circus such big cats are tamed by the animal trainer, but this succeeds only through a confident manner and constant, controlling eye contact. This attitude is an example for us too. More about that later.

Because the Galatians loved the law instead of the Spirit, the works of the flesh came out. Their life together was determined by fleshly (that is, sinful) behavior. In the conflict between Spirit and flesh, Paul is not concerned with what happens *within us*, but with what happens *among one another*. This conflict is not about attention directed inward and self-contemplation – about what goes on inside me – but about behavior that others feel the effects of: either vainglory and envy or the willingness to bear one another's burdens (5:26 – 6:2). The source of the former is the flesh. The Spirit wants what is good for the other person, as it was brought about through Jesus Christ. That is why he is to take shape in us through the fruit of the Spirit, which is nothing other than the expression of his nature. The dead works of the flesh, which testify to an Adam doomed to die, are to be banished from the fellowship of believers. That works only through the working of the Spirit. Divine fruit will not grow through our own effort, but is brought about by God, who alone gives the growth.

Spirit and flesh are in an endless conflict. It is about two great principles, represented on the one hand by the sinful nature and on the other by God's Spirit. We are all personally affected, because the flesh still dwells in us. And the holy God takes it on by deploying his Holy Spirit. Astonishing! So much power must be required – God himself comes down to us to take up this fight.

The conflict between Spirit and flesh in the letter to the Galatians is not aimed in the first place at the idea that two hearts beat in our breast. It does not

teach an unceasing conflict in our inner being (similar to what is described in Romans 7). Rather, it is first about how the members of God's household behave toward one another. It is not about what I experience when I am alone, but about how we are when we have fellowship with one another. Of course it is also about a conflict within us, because we ourselves have the flesh in us, while at the same time the Spirit of God dwells in us. The impulses of the flesh are there, after all, when we are alone too.

After this quick introduction to the letter to the Galatians within the framework of the overarching theme, let us first gather from the letter what we have become as Christians. Paul deals with the conflict between Spirit and flesh only at the end of the letter.

12.3 The Christian in the Letter to the Galatians

- Jesus gave himself for our sins (1:4).
- rescued from the present evil world (or the present age) (1:4)
- freedom in Christ Jesus (2:4; 5:1)
- justified by faith in Christ (2:16-17)
- died to the law (2:19)
- living for God (2:19)
- crucified with Christ (2:19)
- Christ lives in the believer (2:20)
- loved by Christ (2:20)
- received the Spirit (3:2, 5)
- blessed through faith (3:9)
- redeemed from the curse of the law (3:13)
- received the promise of the Holy Spirit (3:14)
- life not through law, but through faith (3:21-22)
- sons of God through faith (3:26)
- We have put on Christ (3:27).
- We are in Christ (3:28; 5:6).
- We are Christ's (his property) (3:29; 5:24).
- redeemed for sonship (4:5-6)
- The Spirit of the Son is in our hearts (4:6).
- God is our dear Father (4:6).
- heirs through God (4:7)

- Christ is taking shape in us (4:19).
- born according to (of) the Spirit (4:29)
- called by God (5:8, 13)
- We walk by the Spirit (5:16, 25).
- The Spirit leads us (5:18).
- We live by the Spirit (5:25).
- heirs of the kingdom of God (5:21)
- eternal life (in the resurrection) (6:8)
- members of the household of faith (6:10)
- crucified to the world (6:14)
- a new creation (6:15).

This is a tremendous sum of God's saving work. This is the indicative of salvation – what is “already” ours by faith here on earth. Having made ourselves thoroughly aware of this catalog of salvation, we will consider from this perspective how we are to deal with the flesh and its desires and how the fruit of the Spirit can grow.

12.4 Law and Flesh – Two Gears in One Transmission

How is it that in this letter to the Galatians Paul goes into the subject of the lust of the flesh and of desires so concretely? He shows that the law did not, in fact, help them to a holy life. On the contrary, the law brought out the old life of the Galatians again. The law provokes sin and the lust of the flesh through its prohibitions and commandments (see also Romans 7). Paul supplies the proof right away: The Galatians did not keep the law that required them to love their neighbor. Even this commandment (not only a Mosaic one, but a Christian one too) gave them difficulties, for they treated one another in anything but a friendly way (Gal 5:15). The claim to faithfulness to the law and the reality were miles apart. Flesh and law belong together, because the law is addressed to the natural, unregenerate human being. This connection, which is severed in someone who has come to faith, the Galatians restored. Were they not in this way bringing the old self back to life? But Paul shows them what newness of life in the Spirit looks like.

12.5 The Age-Old Cosmic Conflict and the Present Personal Conflict

At the beginning of human history came the Fall. As a result, enmity has been put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the devil (Gen 3:15). Christ is the seed of the woman and will crush the serpent's head, though in pain. This enmity, ultimately the conflict between light and darkness, is cosmic and omnipresent in nature, but it has also arrived *in* every Christian. Through the new life and the Spirit's moving into the heart of the Christian, there are now two opposite poles there that can never be brought into line, whose direction can never be unified – a war between two kinds of nature. Two commanders, namely Spirit and flesh, face each other and fight each other. "The Christian is at the same time the scene and the object, the battlefield and the prize of the conflict between flesh and Spirit."⁶² The opponents know no ceasefire. Never. Wherever we are, the flesh is there; we carry it around with us. But God's mighty Spirit is in us too. He always stands by our side to help us in this conflict. Better said: He wants to lead this fight. But Paul does not emphasize the constant fight, but the daily life by the Spirit. The Christian may be assured that the Spirit will prevail. Exceptions, that is, missteps, confirm this rule!

12.6 Live and Walk by the Spirit!

Walk in the Spirit (by the Spirit), and you will not carry out the lust of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Gal 5:16-17

Instead of living by the law, the Galatians were to walk by the Spirit of God, so as not to give room to the flesh and its effects. Only in this way could the recipients of the letter come to treat one another lovingly.

The flesh is something very much alive. *Lust* and *desire* are strong forces; they are the flesh's signs of life. The lust of the flesh includes every unlawful desire that is about fulfilling and pursuing self-centered goals. That can be many things – including some we might never have suspected. As a Christian one can do one

62. H. Schlier, *Galater*, p. 181, quoted in E. Mauerhofer, *Der Kampf zwischen Fleisch und Geist bei Paulus*.

and the same thing either by the Spirit or by the flesh. The origin, the motivation, and the goal decide whether the person does the thing in question in the Spirit (or with a spiritual mindset) or in the flesh (or with a fleshly mindset). The old, deposed owner of my old life is embodied by the flesh, or sin. The old owner is still there, even though he no longer has any authority or rights. He is still traveling with us as long as we are not yet with the Lord and are living in our earthly body. The *flesh* is not identical with the biological body; rather, it uses it, just as the soul and the spirit also use it as an instrument. Works of the flesh include not only deeds that are done with hands and feet, but also mental and spiritual things that belong to the realm of thoughts, sensations, and feelings (pride, willfulness, contempt, ingratitude, hatred, impure thoughts, adultery in one's thoughts, false or excessive ambition, the occult, and much more).

The flesh opposes the Spirit and wants to assert its old rights. It once held the monopoly position of determining everything, and it has programmed sinful habits into our thinking and doing. But now the Spirit has taken over possession and leadership in order to take up position against the flesh and its habits. This old programming is not erased on the day of my salvation (my personal turning point in salvation and my conversion). Rather, it is brought by the Spirit to the place where it belongs: into death.

There is a conflict in the Christian that takes place between my flesh and the Holy Spirit. Peter speaks of it when he says that we are to abstain from fleshly desires, *which wage war against the soul* (1 Pet 2:11). Desires, says James, wage war in our members (Jas 4:1; see also 1:13-15) by craving to be fed and satisfied.

12.7 God's Working and Our Working – a Contradiction?

In the NT we are often called to act, while at the same time it is God who brings about what is called for. It is similar here. The statement found here (“Walk in the Spirit”) is therefore an imperative of salvation. It is an “active-passive form.” It is we who walk (active), but we are to do it by the power of the Spirit (passive).

Flesh and Spirit are opposed to each other, *so that you do not do what you want*. What does Paul mean by this? Are there three participants in this conflict? Evidently: There is the flesh, there is God's Spirit, and there is me, the

responsible person who decides for one side. The short sentence “... so that you do not do what you want” has at least three aspects:

1. We were called to freedom (5:13), so that we do not do what our flesh wants.
2. The fight is waged not by us but by the Spirit.
3. We (our self) stand right in the middle of this conflict as those affected by it.

12.8 Called to Freedom – but What Kind of Freedom Is It?

The guiding word of the conflict between Spirit and flesh (5:1) – that is, the message of the letter – is freedom. But in the same breath Paul warns against using this freedom from the Mosaic law as a license for the flesh. For outside the Mosaic law a new law applies, namely, that of Christ (6:2)! The new law is the law of the Spirit, with which Christ shapes our life and whose effects can be seen in the fruits of the Spirit. “Freedom arises within the law, not outside it. When does a locomotive have the greatest freedom? When it stumbles over rocks and roots? Of course not! When it lets itself be ‘forced’ onto the rails, it runs smoothly and without friction, for that is how it is built. It needs the ‘order’ and the ‘discipline’ of the rails in order to run smoothly and fast.”⁶³ Paul calls this guidance along the track “leading” and “walking” by God’s Spirit. As a result, the manifold fruit of the Spirit grows, while at the same time the works of the flesh disappear more and more. That is the divine alternative to the Mosaic law, even though at the same time we fulfill the Mosaic law when we “love one another” through the Spirit of God (5:14; see also Rom 8:3).

This is about leaving the realm of the law. This has already happened to us at Golgotha: We have died to the law (Gal 2:19; Rom 7:6). When this has taken place, we are not standing in a no-man’s-land where no laws apply. We belong to God – it is *his* land. This land is contested, because the goal has not yet been reached. The conflict between Spirit and flesh awaits everyone who enters into the new life. If we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the law; the two ways of conducting life (law and Spirit) exclude each other.

12.9 The Spirit Fights for Us

It actually looks as though in this conflict we have a kind of spectator role. Because Spirit and flesh are fighting in us, we can no longer do what we want at

63. Jay E. Adams, *Grundlagen biblischer Lebensberatung*, p. 256.

all, because the two of them do what they want! The flesh produces works of the flesh, the Spirit the fruit of the Spirit. Albrecht (German Bible translation) translates: “For the flesh with its desire opposes the Spirit as an enemy, and likewise the Spirit opposes the flesh. The two are locked in battle with each other and do not allow you to act according to your will.” The lesson is that in this conflict we “do not do what we want,” however well it is meant. The fight against the flesh is waged by the Spirit. But it does not pass us by as though it did not concern us. We cannot go on vacation and let the Spirit do the fighting. What is meant is that the fight against the flesh is part of our own experience, but is lost if fought with our own effort. We have no strength as long as we do not leave the fight to God. We do have the will, but not the means. The conflict takes place in my soul, or in my heart, where, however, the new commander, the Spirit, has taken charge.

12.10 In the Midst of the Battle

Let us repeat the text in the words of the Neue Genfer Übersetzung (NGÜ, German Bible translation):

“What do I mean by this? Let the Spirit of God determine your behavior; then you will no longer give in to the desires of your own nature. For human nature with its desire is directed against the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God with his desire is directed against human nature. The two are in conflict with each other, and each side wants to prevent you from doing what the other side is urging you to do.”

There is no neutral self that can escape this conflict between flesh and Spirit. Our *self* draws the driving force of its actions either from the flesh or from the Spirit. We are never passive observers, but stand at the focal point of the conflict. We are responsible for everything we decide, think, and do. When I am in the immediate confrontation, in temptation and trial, then I must decide clearly and take a stand. “Although ... the Holy Spirit has moved into you and in his person represents both God the Father and God the Son, he will nevertheless never violate the sovereignty of your own will. He will not release you from your decision made on your own responsibility. ... If he nevertheless exercises dominion in every district of your heart, if he thus determines your behavior, this happens only at your own free choice and joyful consent. But it is this right of veto that lifts you as a human being above the animal kingdom and

makes you the moral being God destined you to be. That is also what – and only this – enables you to love God in return and thus to return his love. This joyful ‘yes’ to God at every moment of your life fills the Creator’s heart with greater joy than all the exciting (interesting) wonders of millions of worlds that were flung out into the infinity of space by his almighty word. None of them possesses the ability to love him, because they do not have the capacity of free choice. The privilege of being yourself and being human therefore lies in the fact that you may know, choose, and love God. That is your very own personal privilege.”⁶⁴

The presence of the Spirit is not an automatic mechanism with a built-in guarantee of winning. Our motto for life should be: to live with Jesus, to stay close to him, and to let his word dwell richly in us. In this way we will decide for the Spirit and against the flesh.

God’s working and our responsibility never exclude each other. If we speak only of God’s action, it may be that we let ourselves drift into passivity. If we constantly look at our duty and responsibility, then we are not looking at Christ but at the sin we want to defeat. With this perspective we will be in danger of fighting in our own strength and of becoming tense and cramped. The Spirit encompasses the new rule of life and the power to live by it. His leading is not only a matter of showing the way; rather, the Spirit is our traveling companion; he goes ahead of us.

12.11 The Viruses and the Vaccine

Here is one more comparison that illustrates the role of my will, of the flesh, and of the Spirit. Let us compare the dormant pathogens in my body with our flesh. With a healthy lifestyle, illness will rarely occur. If I eat unhealthily, if I do not dress warmly enough, this can lead to a cold. If I then take medicine (I have to make this decision), it will take up the fight against the cold in my body. This fight does take place in my body, but I do not fight it out myself. I can, however, initiate this fight through the conscious decision to take a medicine. Furthermore, I can promote the success of the medicine through plenty of rest, good nutrition, and fresh air.

64. W. Ian Thomas, *Tote können nicht sterben*, p. 115.

12.12 What Are the Works of the Flesh?

Paul leaves no doubt about what he means by the flesh and its works. His catalog of these works is not exhaustive, as though there were no other sins besides the ones named here. With the closing words of the catalog, “and things like these,” God’s word gives every reader not only the opportunity to continue the list, but indirectly the command to identify the works of his own flesh.

The works of the flesh differ, both in their effect and in how they are to be judged. It is not for nothing that sexual immorality stands in first place. But whether “small or great sins,” they all come from the same evil source. Our flesh is capable of every one of the things named here (both in deeds and in attitude). In this respect the flesh is like a seed in which every possible sin is hidden, ready to come out one day. The fact that Paul does not speak of the *fruit* of the flesh, as he does with the Spirit, seems to have to do with the works of the law on which the Galatians wanted to rely. In other words: We are able to do the works of the flesh in our own strength, while we are incapable of producing the fruits of the Spirit ourselves. For that we need the Holy Spirit. Now the works of the flesh are evident (5:19-21):

- **Sexual immorality** (Gr. *porneia*) – fornication, *any* sexual activity outside of marriage
- **Impurity** – what is perverse, what is filthy; unrestrained or shameless behavior in the sexual realm, whether inside or outside of marriage; the corruption of the whole personality as it poisons every area of life
- **Debauchery** – lack of moderation, licentiousness, dulling of the senses
- **Idolatry** – the veneration of anything that pushes God and his will out of first place in a person’s life (idol worship as well as the ideological idolatry of our day); selfishness
- **Sorcery** (Gr. *pharmakeia*) – magic, witchcraft, occultism, spiritism, drugs
- **Enmity** – turning away from people, discord, hatred, bad temper toward other persons
- **Strife** – discord, quarreling, a contentious spirit
- **Jealousy** – envy, selfish and other behavior aimed at one’s own advantage, suspicions

- **Anger** – rage, outbursts of anger, unrestrained attack on those around us, vehement insistence on one’s own opinion
- **Quarrels** – disputes, intrigues
- **Dissensions** – scattering, rifts, conflicts
- **Factions**⁶⁵ – heresy, divisions, sects; disruptive forming of groups
- **Envy** – the habit of begrudging others everything
- **Murder** – hatred, killing (actual and not only in thought)
- **Drunkenness** – excessive consumption of alcohol, states of intoxication
- **Carousing** – drinking bouts and binge eating, gluttony, reveling
- **and things like these.**

There is no future in the kingdom of God for people who do these things, for whom such things are normal, who persist in them, and who do not confess and forsake sin (5:21).

12.13 The Fruit of God's Spirit

The precious fruit in which the Father and the Son delight, and which is just as much a joy for those who are blessed by it, is produced in the believer by God’s Spirit. I cannot cause fruit to grow, because God gives the growth⁶⁶ (1 Cor 3:6). I myself am to create the “framework conditions” under which good growth is possible. I can try to provide good soil, I can prevent and remove the weeds of the flesh, and I can make sure there is sufficient “watering” through God’s word. In all this, however, we must not overlook the “miraculous”: More than any sign and wonder, it is a supernatural act of God when people change from hate-filled sinners into creatures in whose hearts the love of God has been poured out and who then themselves love as God loves. But the fruit of the Spirit is (5:22-23):

1. **Love** – divine, self-sacrificing love, here especially within the church of God, which is not a feeling but a decision of the will. Without this love for God and people, everything in the Christian life too is worthless (1 Cor 13). We love because he first loved us.

65. This is the wording of the footnote in the Elb 2003 (German Bible translation). The main text of this Bible translation has “sects” here.

66. See also Matthew 6:28: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: They *do not toil*, nor do they spin” (emphasis added by the author).

2. **Joy** – the shared joy of the members of God’s people who walk in the Spirit, also in their meetings; genuine joy over what God did among us and among others, what he is doing now, and what he will do according to his promise; joy in the life in Christ
3. **Peace** – not only the absence of strife, but reconciliation, warm-hearted togetherness, solidarity, wholeness
4. **Forbearance** – patience and magnanimity in dealing with others; a lasting willingness to bear with fellow human beings and circumstances; love from its passive but persevering side
5. **Kindness** – a benevolent, always helpful and understanding attitude, a gentle nature, generosity; the active side of love
6. **Goodness** – warm-hearted goodness, similar to kindness; giving the other person what is right and good
7. **Faithfulness (faith)** – trust in God; the virtue of reliability, sincerity, loyalty; imitating God, who always stands by his word and is faithful to his promises
8. **Gentleness** – mildness, strength, and tenderness (there is no exactly matching German word); the opposite of selfishness and excessive demands; lowliness of mind with regard to oneself
9. **Self-control** – self-mastery, self-discipline, and self-control, balance.

The fruit, or fruits, are manifold and extensive. Like the previous one, this “list” too is not exhaustive but representative. William Barclay says that it is difficult to find in this enumeration both an exact definition and a clear distinction between the items.⁶⁷ With all these ethical qualities and virtues, one can see that it is almost impossible for a human being to experience them more or less consistently in his life. It is indeed a fruit of God.

Paul closes his list by picking up the common thread again: “*Against such things there is no law*” (verse 23). In other words: When these virtues are visible among us thanks to the presence of the Spirit, the law is irrelevant. People who love one another through the Spirit no longer need a Torah to command them: You shall not kill.

67. William Barclay, *Fleisch oder Geist?* (Flesh and Spirit), Augsburg, 1968.

12.14 The Flesh Belongs on the Cross

The Christian has taken the clearest possible position toward the flesh. He himself has nailed the flesh to the cross. We believe this and act accordingly. Our flesh has deserved nothing other than death on the cross. This is exactly what Paul says:

“But those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Gal 5:24

Whoever belongs to Christ has done this *once for all*. When we believed in Christ, we condemned our old life and renounced it. We acknowledged God’s death sentence on our godless life and on what was the driving force of this godless life: the flesh. Why crucified? Because Christ took upon himself on the cross, in our place, the death sentence on our old self.

The flesh carries passion and desire within it as its elixir of life. With the step of faith toward Christ we renounced them. That places us under an obligation, for what one has oneself crucified and put to death should then remain in death and no longer be seen in our life. But despite the crucifixion, despite the putting to death, the flesh with its works is still there. It is still incorrigible within us. This corresponds to the word to the Romans that we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin (Rom 6:11). God did something for us so that it is possible to escape the dictatorship of sin. So it is in this word too. The cross of Jesus Christ is the end of the flesh, the end of the old self, the end of the old ego. Without the cross and without this knowledge, a walk in the Spirit is not possible.

It does not say that we are to crucify our flesh daily. That is often said with good intentions. But the truth is that we are to proceed on the assumption that it was crucified once – with Christ. That is the start into a new life with the best conditions, given by God himself. Now, after the event of the cross, in newness of life, we are dealing with the individual *works* of the flesh. The flesh wages a “guerrilla war” from ambush. We are to “put to death” these attacks by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). Putting to death means not letting them revive. I call to mind the death of Christ for my old self and what it cost him to die for it. In this way I come again and again to God’s view and verdict on the flesh, which then helps me to take consistent action against it.

12.15 Who Are You after Being Crucified with Christ?

When we are described as those who have themselves crucified the flesh, that is only *one* side of the coin. Paul describes the other side at the beginning of the letter:

... I have been crucified with Christ; but I live, no longer I,⁶⁸ but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith, by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:19-20

This is perhaps the most fitting description of what being a Christian is. Our old life, or the state of our self-determination in which the compass needle always pointed to ourselves, has been crucified with Christ. That was the only way to be truly set free from the old life – and above all in such a way that this took place in a legally valid way before God’s righteousness and holiness. No one wants to lose his life and give up his self-determination, because he is afraid of loss in view of what comes afterward. That is how the flesh has “programmed” us, and this “software” is still running in us. How often we cling to what we are and what we have! We recognize too little what God puts in the place of the old. But this word is unmistakable. “Quite radically: I have died, I live! Dead in Christ’s death, alive in Christ’s life. This is put so strongly that it is not easy for our powers of comprehension to grasp. We think: That cannot be, for a person surely remains himself; you surely remain the person you are? Some have sought a solution here by dividing the human being into three parts: spirit, soul, and body, with the body and the soul having to die so that the spirit can live. But we must not see Paul’s words from a Western point of view; rather, we must take them for what they are intended to be and try to understand them according to their purpose. The life in Adam is over, since God’s righteousness is now revealed in the gospel. The life of Christ begins for everyone who accepts the gospel.”⁶⁹

Indeed, we should understand this Bible verse, so central for our life, as simply as possible. “You will always remain yourself and no one else. The person who gets up in the morning is exactly the same one who went to bed the

68. “But I live, no longer I” reproduces the footnote text of the Elb 2003 at this point.

69. H. P. Medema, *Romeinen 7 enzovoorts*, p. 80.

evening before. So you simply have to come to terms with the fact: You yourself are the person you have to get along with for the rest of your days. But secondly, it is God's will! He never wanted you to be anyone other than yourself. But he does want you now really to be the person he has destined you to be ...

My self (the same self that commits sin in me) has been crucified with Christ. 'I live (the same self that Christ made out of me), yet now not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20) ... You lose nothing of your own personality when by faith you take your place on the cross with Christ. On the contrary, your personality undergoes a transformation. You simply come under different management, so that it is then said of you: 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, everything has become new' (2 Cor 5:17)."⁷⁰

In place of the old self and the old ego another now comes in, with the fullness of his life. This is a victor's life, resurrection life, divine life. It is, after all, the Lord Jesus Christ himself who now moves into my life, into my personality, into my heart, to remain there forever. That is being a Christian! The sign of Christianity is an empty cross, an empty tomb, Christ on the throne, and Christ in me! Not a change of life imposed on me from outside – no, it is Christ who lives in me and accomplishes what pleases God. It is a new life coming out of the renewed heart. It is Christ himself who works and who is the inexhaustible source of power for my new life. He is the source not only for "spiritual things" (Bible reading, prayer, evangelism, etc.), but the source for my whole life, including my work, simply for every second of my life. I do not just pretend that it is so – it is reality that Christ lives in me. This life is marked by trust in the Son of God, who first made everything possible through his sacrifice for me and for each person personally.

12.16 Taking Up the Cross Daily

Before Jesus was crucified at Golgotha, he was already speaking of the cross – not only of his own, but of the cross of every individual who would follow him. In Luke 9:23 (see also Luke 14:27; Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34) it says:

"And (Jesus) said to all: If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

70. W. Ian Thomas, *Tote können nicht sterben*, pp. 106ff.

The Lord Jesus speaks here of (often painful) self-denial. Whoever follows him does not follow himself, his ego, and his goals, but his Master and Teacher. My *self* has been given over to death; it no longer has any significance. Consciously taking up this cross and dragging it to the place of execution is a daily duty of a disciple. This is of course a comparison. It is about a principle that the Lord illustrates with this drastic example. Whoever loses his life (namely, on the cross of self-denial and self-surrender) will find true life, life in abundance (Matt 10:39). Now, these words of Jesus do not correspond exactly to what Paul said to the Galatians regarding their having crucified the flesh. One reason for this, for example, is that Paul is dealing with evil things of the flesh. Jesus, however, also has in view things that need not necessarily be evil – on the contrary. There are plenty of things that are good in themselves but that, when examined closely, keep us from following Jesus wholeheartedly.

My (personal) cross is nothing abstract; it is aimed at me personally, at my peculiarities and my situation. It is those areas where the flesh can still be seen in me. The cross of my sister and my brother probably looks different. Denying oneself in this way costs an immense amount. Carrying the cross is also a spectacle of the worst kind. Whoever carries the cross can expect no honor from people.

12.17 Living and Walking by the Spirit: To Be and Not to Be

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Gal 5:25

The cross put an end to the old with God's thoroughness. We were also born again by the Spirit, because the flesh was corrupt. We were made alive; we have passed from spiritual death into life. This life is the new existence in Christ; this is the new self. The Holy Spirit is called the source and power of this new life here. How, then, are the two words live and walk related to each other? What distinguishes them? Living is the heartbeat of the new self – the fact that it exists. It embodies the new creation that Christ himself, as the Redeemer and the Risen One, has created. We are his masterpiece. The old has gone, the new has come.

But the one who is born again is not a statue; he is a new, living *human being*, created after the pattern of Jesus Christ. A new human being walks according

to his model, namely Christ, the beginning and author of the new creation. Walking means not only *being* (living) but also *acting*. Life obliges us to movement and liveliness. Walking means taking one step after another. Life from God always bears fruit, namely the fruit of the Spirit. A motor vehicle needs fuel to be able to drive. When the tank is empty, you have to push it. An electric motor needs electricity; otherwise it will be of no use to anyone. The Christian needs the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit. “The leading of the Spirit means that he remains in us and with us as a mighty leader, a wise teacher, a patient coach. This ‘leading’ is not a one-time, sensational event, but a continuously progressing process.”⁷¹ Once again: Living alone is just as insufficient as the mere presence of the Spirit. We may not merely call the Spirit our own; we must also submit ourselves to his claim to possession, leadership, and guidance. We must fan this fire into flame again and again, and do so for one another as well, instead of quenching the Spirit.

12.18 Walking by the Spirit – How Is That Supposed to Work?

Perhaps we have noticed that Paul does say that we are to walk by the Spirit, but does not describe concretely how we are to do it. The whole letter is like a “plea for the Spirit.” That is why the law is definitively ruled out: “For a soul that has not yet grasped what the true deliverance is that God has prepared for us, the most natural (and most obvious) remedy is to try it with the law. That is no remedy, but exactly the opposite.”⁷² Calling on the law for help is exactly the opposite of what walking by the Spirit involves. Paul seems simply to presuppose life by the Spirit as a real and tangible experience. His text itself supplies characteristics of being led by the Spirit:

- not making the (or a) law one’s rule of life
- The person concerned *wants* to walk by the Spirit. Whoever walks by the Spirit faces up to the corresponding call and to the conscious and ever-recurring decision to give him dominion over our life.
- accepting in faith that our flesh is evil and good for nothing and had to be crucified with Christ
- taking care to produce the fruits of the Spirit toward others
- taking care not to allow the works of the flesh

71. H. P. Medema, *Romeinen 7 enzovoorts*, p. 138.

72. F. W. Grant, *Numerical Bible*, vol. 6, p. 313.

- I acknowledge and believe: Christ and his Spirit live in me.
- not walking in one's own self-centered effort, but in dependence on God asking him for the leading of the Spirit and expecting it from him
- concentrating not on the conflict against the flesh in me, but on Christ and everything that has to do with him.

12.19 Stumbling and Getting Up Again

Brothers, even if a person is overtaken by a misstep, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Gal 6:1

“The coming of the Spirit means that a ‘divine infection’ has broken out ... , but not that divine perfection has dawned. Our life now stands under the guidance of the one who originally brought about the inspiration of the law, which of course does not mean that people among the people of God cannot be ‘caught off guard by a fault.’”⁷³ It is not realistic to assume that we live constantly and exclusively in victory. The conflict between Spirit and flesh uses the metaphor of battle, and that includes defeats as well. In Christ we are “already” victors, but we are “not yet” at the goal. The final victory is certain for us, but on the front line one position or another is sometimes overrun by the enemy. That is what happened to the one whom Paul describes here as a person who has taken a misstep.

Those who are spiritually minded are to restore such a one in gentleness. The living, trusting, and active fellowship of believers, our life together and our friendships in the Lord, have an important function in the conflict between Spirit and flesh – both in mutual encouragement and in getting back on track and helping others back on track. In doing so, the spiritually minded are to be on their guard not to succumb to the same temptation themselves, for although they are spiritually minded, the flesh with all its desires, passions, and enticements is, after all, a constant danger in them too.

Paul is not concerned here with a particular misstep. The same divine emergency plan for restoration applies to all the countless different missteps, small and great. A misstep is a transgression, a false step, a stumble on the

73. Gordon Fee, *Der Geist Gottes und die Gemeinde* (Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God), Metzingen, 2005, p. 192.

racetrack of faith. A misstep includes a sin, a work of the flesh, a giving in to temptation.

Without self-exaltation, we who stand and live under grace may say that such defeats are not the rule in a normal Christian life. We must, however, humbly admit that they are part of our daily experience. If we think we have no sin, says John, then we deceive ourselves. We must take sin in our life very seriously.

12.20 Getting Back on Track

After a misstep one has to get back onto the right path. A misstep always brings spiritual damage with it, the extent of which depends on the kind and the significance of the misstep. This is about a principle, namely, that after a misstep things must not go on as though nothing had happened. Our activity is called for. We must not pass over sin indifferently, as if nothing had happened.

Getting back on track means: Christ and the Spirit lead me as quickly as possible to the point where I do not hide my sin but confess it and bring it into the open. I am to recognize the sin that I (as a child of light) have committed, repent of it (that is, grieve over it), and confess it (that is, admit it), and be aware of God's forgiveness.

12.21 Our Helper in Heaven

Something must happen when we have sinned. In this case Christ, our advocate in heaven, is active as a helper for us:

My children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin; and if anyone has sinned – we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1

Our helper and advocate, as the Righteous One, settled the question of sin once for all with his sacrifice. But now, when sin occurs in our life, he works on our heart and conscience after a misstep. The helper takes care of *us*, not of the Father, on whose throne he sits. He does not have to appease the Father so that he is not angry with us. Sin is not the Father's problem but ours. Jesus Christ wants to bring us to recognize our sin, to repent (that is, to regret it), and to confess it. At the same time he assures us of the Father's love, so that we recognize that we are unconditionally accepted. Sin does not sever the eternal life connection with the Father.

The NT does not call on the children of God to ask for forgiveness when they have sinned. All their sins, including future ones, *have been* forgiven forever (Eph 1:7; 4:32; Col 1:14; 2:13; 3:13; Heb 10:18; 1 John 2:12). That, incidentally, is the great difference from the OT, where believers too, such as David, ask for forgiveness. After the cross this is no longer necessary. Nevertheless, we confess sin and repent of it, because we are to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy. In this sense we need cleansing through the water of God's word: The word shows us the sin, and then we must confess it and of course forsake it: "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Complete forgiveness was granted to us on the day of our conversion through the blood of Jesus. But because we can still sin, we as believers need cleansing through the water of God's word.

12.22 What If We Have Sinned?

Do we have to prove that we can do better after all? Do we have to wipe out our guilt with acts of penance? Or is a misstep of no further significance, since all our sins have already been forgiven anyway?

We are to recognize, confess, and forsake our sins. There is no way around this; it is a must: Whenever we – the believers – have sinned, and we all stumble often and in many ways (Jas 3:2), we are to confess the sin. Confessing has the meaning of "uncovering." To confess means to call something what it really is. Translated literally it means "to say the same thing," namely, the same thing that God says about it. We are to call sin sin. In this regard we must not excuse or gloss over anything.

A believer's confession of sin does not wipe out the guilt of sin that would bring us to hell. Our guilt of sin was erased for all time by the blood of Jesus. Sin in a believer impairs the consciously experienced Father-child relationship, fellowship with God. The practical, experiential fellowship with the Father and the Son is impaired and disturbed and wounded by a fleshly life. But a child of the Father remains a child even when the two are no longer speaking to each other and the child has been disobedient. But in order to have a genuine, living, and at the same time loving fellowship, all disruptive factors must be removed, and in our heavenly Father-child relationship these are to be found only on our side. We must turn back and throw ourselves again and again into the arms of our loving heavenly Father.

Isn't it easy, then, to confess sin? No, not always. There are various reasons for this. The most common reason is that at first we often react as though this sin had not been sin. Our heart, in the power of the flesh, can be so proud as to find every possible excuse that seeks to prove that it is not sin. It is astonishing how long it often takes us to come to a recognition of sin.

Another reason is that with sins we commit again and again, we no longer dare to confess them. Because we are so ashamed, we first want to prove that we can do better after all. But that raises the question of our image of God. We then have a false idea of God, according to which we make our acceptance by him dependent on our performance. Over against this, we are accepted forever; the Father loves us at all times, just as he loves his own Son. This love for us does not become less through our sin or greater through our faithfulness!

How restoration, spiritual recovery, and healing proceed in detail and are experienced, and how long they take, always has to do with which sin was committed and what its history was, and also with whether it happened unexpectedly or had already become a habit. What matters is that after the confession of sin our relationship with the Father and the Son is once again unclouded and undisturbed, even if we have to bear the consequences of certain sins.

12.23 Confessing

It is interesting that the NT says little on the subject of how we as believers are to deal with sins that are found in our life. Sins that we commit against one another we are to confess to one another (Jas 5:16) and forgive one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).

In Corinth the church had become guilty because it did not place under church discipline a man who was living in sexual immorality. In this context restoration meant sorrow, grief, and repentance, the recognition and confession of sin (2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:9-11).

- To confess sin means to call the sin by name. We do not make a blanket confession at the end of the day in order to “cover” all our sins with it. Let us imagine a child who comes to his father and says: “I confess to you all the bad things I did today.” What will the father say? – Our heavenly Father wants to know specifically what we are confessing.

- We should not wait until the end of the day at all. As soon as I sin, I confess the sin at once. Surely we do not want to let the sin stand between us and our heavenly Father until the end of the day, or simply forget it!
- At a Bible conference someone asked whether a sin that we have committed unknowingly impairs fellowship with the Father. The answer was: “Yes.” But this answer is wrong! We have to realize that, far more than we think possible, we unknowingly do things that are sinful. They are not the normal thing and are not intended, but they happen. Sometimes we also lack the knowledge of whether something is sin. That is why we will never be able to confess all the sins that we commit as Christians, even though that is our sincere wish. Fellowship with the Father is impaired where we do not confess sin of which we are aware.

Paul emphasizes here “pastoral care,” the shepherding ministry, the carrying out of which is entrusted to those who are spiritually minded (and which is to be accepted by those who have sinned). That is a subject that will not be gone into further here. Restoration is necessary with every misstep. With a great misstep it will look different than with a small one. An evil thought is not a misstep that throws us off the track of faith. We must nevertheless confess it.

12.24 The Spiritual and the Carnal Christian – Do They Exist?

The *spiritual* Christian is called to help back onto his (spiritual) “feet” the one who has been overtaken by a misstep and has stumbled or fallen in temptation. First: Who is “spiritual” (cf. Gal 6:1)? That is not everyone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, who has life through the Spirit and is therefore a child of God. Rather, it is the one who also walks by the Spirit and is led by him. The spiritual person is not a church official, but someone who is shaped by the Spirit: Christ is life for him, and the fruit of the Spirit is recognizable. The spiritual person is not without faults, but is someone who stands on the side of the Spirit in the conflict between Spirit and flesh.

The Christian who has stumbled, who is to receive help from his spiritual fellow members of the household of faith, is not called a carnal person who differs from his spiritual brothers and sisters. One does not automatically become a carnal Christian through a misstep. A “misstep” or a “transgression” is not something that characterizes my whole life. (That would be the case if my

world of thoughts had long since succumbed to temptation and I had then, as a result, actually stumbled.)

The Galatians had begun in the Spirit when they came to faith. But since they wanted to submit to the law, Paul warns them against attempting in this way to become mature and perfect by the power of their sinful and corrupt flesh. Within the framework of the law it is the flesh that is activated, not the Spirit of God (Gal 3:3). And indeed the result among the Galatians was that they behaved toward one another like predators. Unfortunately, not much of the Holy Spirit could be seen.

Paul calls the Corinthians fleshly (1 Cor 3:1-3). They had come to faith years before, but little spiritual maturity could be seen. We are familiar with the conditions in Corinth. The sum of this behavior, which was marked by strife and division, made them carnal Christians.

A carnal Christian lets himself be led more or less by his flesh (by what appeals to the senses, by this-worldly things, by his own notions, ideas, and powers). He does not really try to fight the deeds or works of the flesh. This happens only through confession of sin (1 John 1:9) and renewed devotion (Rom 6:13; 12:1-2), as well as through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, who changes us.

But a Christian who has been a believer for decades and is nevertheless marked by obvious self-centeredness proves to be carnal. He is born again, as was the case with many in the church at Corinth. But despite the new birth and the possession of the Holy Spirit, one can be fleshly minded for long periods, or even throughout one's whole life. It will become evident at the judgment, when all fleshly works burn up and one is saved oneself "as through fire," so to speak by the skin of one's teeth (1 Cor 3:15).

Spiritual growth plays a major role in this question. To be spiritual means to be mature and grown-up in faith. "One prerequisite of spirituality⁷⁴ is time. For it takes time to become what is called the *spiritual person* in 1 Cor 2:15. Just as physical development takes its time, so spiritual growing up also requires its

74. "Spirituality" must not be understood here in the sense of "modern religiosity." Rather, it is simply about "spiritual maturity," "spiritual mindset," or "spiritual nature." Since this is a quotation, the corresponding word in the main text has not been changed.

time. No one is spiritual immediately when he is born again. It takes time to become a spiritual person.”⁷⁵

12.25 The Essence of the Conflict between Spirit and Flesh

Let us follow the common thread of the conflict between Spirit and flesh to its end: Spirit and flesh stand opposed to each other as enemies in our life, in everyday life, and in our relationships with one another. This holds true until we have reached the goal. This is not a dusty theory, but the life experience of every Christian. Spirit and flesh can be unmistakably recognized by their fruits. Both fight for leadership in our life. We ourselves stand at all times right in the middle of this conflict: Everything we do and leave undone is fed by one of these two sources. In other words: Every movement of our body or our thoughts draws its driving force and energy from one of the two sources. Ultimately, we decide. We say yes or no! “The particular role taken by the persons themselves in this battle is neither passive nor neutral. They have to make decisions that determine the course of this battle. Walking in the Spirit involves a serious decision, but not one that entails a strenuous effort of the will to overcome tremendous resistance in order to accomplish something. Rather, Christians are called to entrust themselves to the Spirit and to God’s activity and simply to follow his leading.”⁷⁶

The new concept of life consists in God’s Spirit accomplishing in us what pleases God. The standard for this is no longer the Mosaic law, but Christ, or his law. We are now free to please not ourselves but Christ. To walk by the Spirit in his power means to sow toward the future and one day to reap eternal life for it (Gal 6:8).

“Applying and drawing fully on Christ’s victory requires more than just a single act of faith. It requires a whole attitude of faith. That is a constant reckoning with God. Day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment. And your reckoning with him at this moment will not be sufficient for the next. ‘Walk in the Spirit, and you will not carry out the lusts of the flesh.’”⁷⁷

The flesh pulls downward, toward seeking fulfillment and gratification in the here and now; it constantly tends toward sin. The Spirit pulls upward, toward

75. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Gesetz und Gesetzmäßigkeit*, Hünfeld, 2010, p. 109.

76. Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, p. 138.

77. W. Ian Thomas, *Tote können nicht sterben*, p. 111.

Christ. Let us allow ourselves to be pulled upward! A glider cannot take off by itself; it can only steer and use the wind. It has to be pulled upward. So let us set our minds on the things that are above, where Christ is!

13. New Self and Old Self: The Old Has Gone, the New Has Come

Paul speaks of the *new self* only three times: once in the letter to the Colossians, twice in the letter to the Ephesians. The *new self* is the epitome of what God has accomplished through Christ. God's saving work creates *one* new humanity after the pattern of the glorified Son of Man and at the same time *many* new people!

These people do not simply want to be different by adapting to new standards of behavior – no, they really are a new creation. Just as God created the first human being, the creation of the new self is just as real! This radical change, this exchange of old for new, takes place from the inside out; it is a change of heart, out of which something completely new grows, namely the life of God himself.

The *new self* embodies what the redeemed sinner has now become in Christ. Both of Paul's letters that use this term describe various aspects of our new standing in salvation *in Christ*. One could call the sum of these many undeserved aspects of salvation the *new self*. The texts in which the term *new self* is mentioned read as follows:

"... so that he might create in himself one new humanity out of the two, making peace."

Eph 2:15

"... that, with regard to your former way of life, you have put off the old self, which is being corrupted according to deceitful desires, but are being renewed in the (or by the) spirit of your mind (or of your way of thinking) and have put on the new self, created after God in true righteousness and holiness."

Eph 4:22-24

"Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new (self), which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the one who created it; where there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian,⁷⁸ slave, free, but Christ is all and in all."

Col 3:9-11

78. That is, a member of a nomadic horse-riding people on the Black Sea.

Before we examine these words closely, let us gather together the many aspects of salvation in these two letters as well, as we already did in the letter to the Galatians:

13.1 The New Self in the Letter to the Ephesians

- holy (1:1, 4)
- blessed (1:3)
- chosen (1:4)
- blameless (1:4)
- being God's children (1:5)
- graciously accepted (1:6)
- sealed (1:13)
- made alive (2:5)
- seated with him in the heavenly places, or in the heavenly world (2:6)
- saved (2:8)
- We are *his workmanship* (his handiwork, his creatures), created in Christ Jesus (2:10).
- We who were far away have been brought near (2:13).
- We have been created into *one new humanity* (Jews and Gentiles united in Christ) (2:15).
- reconciled to God (2:16)
- having access to the Father (2:18)
- fellow citizens (2:19)
- members of God's household (2:19)
- fellow heirs (3:6)
- fellow members of the body (3:6)
- fellow partakers of the promise (3:6)
- strengthened by God's Spirit in the *inner person* (3:16)
- Christ dwells in his heart (3:17).
- filled to all the fullness of God (3:19)
- children of light (5:8).

13.2 The New Self in the Letter to the Colossians

- holy (1:2, 22)
- made fit for the inheritance in the light (1:12)

- rescued from the domain of darkness (1:13)
- transferred into the kingdom of the Son of his love (1:13)
- has redemption in him (1:14)
- forgiveness of sins (1:14)
- reconciled (1:22)
- blameless (1:22)
- above reproach (1:22)
- *Christ in us*, the hope of glory (1:27)
- *perfect in Christ* (1:28)
- *complete – brought to fullness – in him* (2:10)
- circumcised (spiritually) in Christ (2:11)
- raised with him (2:13; 3:1)
- died with Christ (2:20; 3:3)
- *Christ is our life* (3:4).
- God's chosen ones (3:12).

This impressive “catalog of salvation” sheds a bright light on what the new self in Christ is.

13.3 The Old Self in the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians

If one wants to explain who and what the *old self* is, these letters also give information about that:

Ephesians

- dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1; cf. 5:6)
- steered and manipulated by the prince of the power of the air (2:2)
- sons of disobedience (2:2)
- determined by the desires of the flesh (2:3)
- by nature children of wrath (2:3)
- without Christ (2:12)
- alienated from the citizenship of Israel (2:12)
- strangers to the covenants of promise (2:12)
- without hope (2:12)
- without God in the world (2:12)
- living in the futility of the mind (4:17)
- darkened in understanding (4:18)

- alienated from the life of God (4:18)
- hardened in heart (4:18)
- without healthy feelings (4:19)
- having no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (5:5)
- (morally) utterly darkness (5:8).

Colossians

- being in the domain of darkness (1:13)
- alienated (from God and from the humanity God intended) (1:21)
- enemies of God in mind (1:21)
- unreconciled (1:22)
- sons of disobedience (3:6).

With this, the differences between the old and the new self are clearly defined. The old self is the old way of life before the total turning point of salvation came and God created a new self through his act of creation in the work of redemption. Now, the new self does not simply embody the new way of life or a new or better way of behaving in contrast to the old life. There are people who have nothing to do with Jesus and who can also change their lives for the better through strong discipline. They even lead a morally better life than many a Christian who is a “new self.” But although a person in the flesh can behave in a morally good way, as long as he is in the flesh he may perhaps please people, but not God. Here we are dealing with a different dimension of change, and not merely with a way of behaving. Nor is it about a reformation of the human being, but about a genuine new creation, namely the creation of new life in the human being. This new thing, namely the new life, is concretely a person: Christ (1 John 5:11-12; Col 3:4, 11). Unfortunately, from God’s point of view nothing of the old self could be used any longer.

13.4 The Creation Story of the New Self

The new self is created according to the specifications of God’s nature, that is, in righteousness, holiness, and truth. What has come into being is indeed a new human being and not merely a new pattern of behavior. The two are inseparably connected: A new human being also has new moral and ethical behavior. That is possible only if the person has also been renewed in moral and ethical terms. That then concerns his heart, conscience, feelings, his spirit,

his mind, and his soul, all of which have to do with morality and ethics and determine them.

These words of Scripture make one think of the creation story of the first human being, because there is at least one parallel here. Adam was created in the image of God and after his likeness (Gen 1:26-28). “And the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). This act of creation makes the human being, in distinction from the animal, a creature of spirit, soul, and body. Naming these three aspects is not meant to raise an anthropological question, but only to point out that the human being, as the bearer of God’s image, also has a spirit. As such he is able to communicate with God, to believe in him, and to pray to him.

The new self in Christ, too, finds its counterpart, or its model, in the one who created it. Who created the new self? God created it. Only God can create something new. But there are also differences from the primeval history. The new creation of the human being became necessary because of the total sinfulness and moral corruption of humankind. That is why the new self is now marked by the total opposite: by righteousness, holiness, and truth, as they were also found in the life of Jesus as a human being on earth. This is of special significance for our daily life, where the point is that on this planet the old and the new selves are still living together.

So God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils. Through this, the body created from the earth became a living being, a person. The Spirit of God also had a share in this event. It was therefore God’s breath that made Adam a person, a being that possesses a spirit. Now, in the new creation of the human being, it is the case that – in comparison with Adam’s creation – the life of Christ is, as it were, breathed into us (cf. also John 20:22). In us this life unites with our person, with our self. That is why it can be said of us that we are new people.

The new *self* stands as a kind of placeholder for each individual person. In other words: The new self is the new Hans-Jörg, the new Christine – in Christ. The decisive thing about this new self is the Christ who lives in us and in whom we live. He is what is actually new. Christ’s life pulses in us! The likeness of Christ is formed only by the indwelling Christ! Nothing else (no laws, rules, resolutions, no effort, no upbringing) can replace this Christ who lives in us.

In Jesus these three named characteristics (righteousness, holiness, and truth) were perfectly present. On the cross he made the creation of a new self possible in the first place, because he took upon himself on the cross all the consequences, the whole bill of the old self (Rom 6:6). Only this cleared the way for something completely new. Now Christ himself is the image after which the new self has been created. Christ is the original image *and* also the copy; the copy insofar as he himself now dwells in me and is this new life. “And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor 15:49). This is only *one* Bible verse among many others that testify that it is God’s plan to change us into the image of Jesus (e.g., Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2). The image of the heavenly man ultimately includes the body, but the process of transformation into Jesus’ image has only just begun with the day of the creation (or birth) of the new self. And the way there goes through Christ himself. Christ in us is the new life and in this sense the “new self.”

13.5 Many Are One New Humanity

In the Letter to the Ephesians the term *new self* (literally “new man”) first occurs in 2:15: “... in order to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.” Here it is about the joining together of Jews and Gentiles into *one new humanity*. Christ himself is here the Creator of the new humanity. Here the worldwide church as the temple of God and the dwelling place of God in the Spirit stands at the center, and so the aspect that emphasizes unity and fellowship as the basic feature of being the new humanity comes to the fore. It is about what all Christians now have in common. And in this sense, too, this new body is ultimately Christ himself: 1 Corinthians 12:12: “... so it is with Christ”: Christ is the body and at the same time the head.

The new self is always spoken of in the singular. In this sense it is also about a new *human community*, of which Christ is the head and the beginning (Col 1:17-18). It stands in contrast to the human community whose head is the fallen Adam (Rom 5:12-21). All believers are needed in order to reflect in their way of life the perfect nature of Christ, that is, the nature of the new self.

“The individual focus in God’s creative work of salvation is expressed in Ephesians 2:10, where Paul refers to each person as ‘created in Christ Jesus.’ The shift to a more corporate perspective comes in 2:11-22. The Adam-Christ

typology also stands behind this passage. But the focus in Ephesians 2:15 is not so much on the individual position before God and its ‘being in Christ’ as opposed to ‘being in Adam,’ but more on the new relationships that exist on the interpersonal level for those who are ‘in Christ.’ Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled, and together in Christ they form the ‘new humanity.’ The ‘new humanity’ is a new society in which all have free and equal access to God and have been placed in the heavenly realms (2:5-6). According to God’s design of the ‘new humanity,’ there are no divisions and no hostility among its members, but only peace (2:16).”⁷⁹

The new self no longer has anything to do with our ethnic origin, with our social and religious background, or with all the advantages and disadvantages and consequences that were once connected with them. All these relationships and connections have come to an end. New ones have come into being – within the house of God, within the church, within the body of Christ. We have, as it were, found a new home in this new humanity.

Now we are also interested in the personal aspect of the new self, in what we have become – each of us personally, individually.

13.6 The Individual Personality Becomes a New Self

The “prototype,” the model of the new self, is the man Christ Jesus. He is the measure of all things. Nevertheless, he is not a uniform human being who levels out, standardizes, or abolishes all the individual traits that make up the personality of each person. Even if the aspect just described, which emphasizes fellowship and unity, may give this impression, the new humanity nevertheless consists of many new creatures (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). It is proof of God’s omnipotence, but also of his wisdom and artistry, that his creation simply overflows with variety and individuality. It is said that no leaf is identical to any other leaf, and that even one snowflake is not like another in its crystalline structure. It is the same with human beings. Outwardly, and in terms of personality as well, no person is 100% the same as any other.

Likewise, each person’s individual personality remains intact at the new birth. When someone comes to faith, at first hardly anything changes outwardly (in his behavior). But within him something tremendous begins: The seed of the

79. Greg Herrick, *Old Man and New Man in Paul*, 1999, p. 5.

word of God is planted – God’s DNA, so to speak – through which he is born again (1 Pet 1:3, 23).

The same person now has an exchanged life: “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith ... in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20). Here the *old* I, which no longer lives, is to be equated with the old self. But there is still an I present now; otherwise the person would no longer exist. This I is now the new self, the new I, I in Christ, who now lives in me (in my inner being). “*I live, and Christ lives in me*” therefore stands for the new self, who is at the same time the same person he was before, but who is now determined by Christ himself and filled by Christ himself.

“A new life was absolutely necessary. With regard to what *I* am, all effort, every need to strive, has come to an end. I cannot give my self any godliness. In the ‘man in Christ’ (2 Cor 12:2), the flesh and sin no longer exist (in the new creation that I am in Christ). More than that – in the truest sense: ‘I’ (understood in the sense of the old self) no longer exist – ‘I am crucified with Christ, I am dead; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.’ Or more precisely: ‘I live, yet no longer I.’ This ‘I, no longer I’ is the secret and the power of putting the Christian faith into practice. *I live*, because of course the person (the individual, that is, each individual human being) remains the same. It is not about Platonic mysticism, not about a pantheistic dissolving into the ocean of being. The joy that fills my heart and the light that illuminates *my* life belong to *me*. They are entirely *mine*. No, from now on I lead a true eternal life that can truly be called that. For the first time, as the apostle says, I have ‘the life that is truly life’ (1 Tim 6:19).

His peace, *his* joy, *his* life, and *his* Spirit now belong to *me*; *his* striving, *his* goals, *his* interests are now mine; the Father’s love is now mine; *his* present rejection and *his* future glory as well; and all of this in the power of a love with which he, at his own personal account and payment, has set me completely free.”⁸⁰

The new self (that is, Christ in me) is the result and the fruit of the suffering of our Savior’s personal self-sacrifice. This new creation is forever marked by the love of Jesus!

80. F. W. Grant, *Deliverance: What is it?*

13.7 What Is the New Self?

In Colossians 3:11 this is the concrete explanation of what the new self is:

Christ (is) all, and in all.

First, Christ is the model of the new self – both in its creation and for its way of life; he is its living space and its hope. But Christ is also *in* us. That is the new self. And that is also the message of the Letter to the Colossians: *Christ in you*, the hope of glory (1:27). *Christ is our life* (3:4).

Now, if one calls Christ himself the new self, one cannot speak of a creation. Christ was not created; he is eternal, because he is God. Something else had to be created, because it did not exist before: A human being becomes a new creation by receiving the life of Christ and a share in his nature. His life is planted into my innermost being. The life of Christ is, as it were, sunk into my individual personality, just as God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils. In this way we have been "brought to fullness" (Col 2:10; ER, German Bible translation), that is, made complete. The life of Christ has now filled or fulfilled our whole existence as we were once born. "All of HIM in all of me"⁸¹. In this way I do not, of course, become a new Christ, but rather a new person, a new Hans-Jörg. One can speak of "new" because his life is now filled by Christ, in that this new life takes hold of his whole inner existence (the inner self, the heart, the mind, the conscience, the soul). This does not, first of all, involve a feeling, but a fact of salvation carried out and accomplished by God!

"The old self was Adam, or better, we in union with Adam. The new self is Christ, or more precisely: we ourselves united with Christ."⁸²

Arthur C. Custance⁸³ describes this process of new creation as the becoming flesh (incarnation) of Christ in the believer. Just as the eternal Son took on flesh and blood when he became man, Christ Jesus as the true man is now born in us in a spiritual (supernatural) sense, in order from then on to grow and take shape in our lives (see also Gal 4:19). In this way every person experiences "his personal Christmas" in his new birth. And only in this respect does the incarnation of Jesus ultimately have meaning for him.

81. W. Ian Thomas, *The Indwelling Life of Christ*.

82. C. K. Barrett, quoted in H. P. Medema, *Romeinen 7 engworts*, p. 79.

83. Arthur C. Custance, *Man in Adam and in Christ*, p. 273.

“The believer in Christ Jesus becomes the owner of a possession he never had before – he becomes a partaker of the divine nature. The eternal life of the uncreated God is planted into the innermost part of his human personality, and his whole nature and being is pulsing with the divine energy of a new life. The new birth is the imparting of a new nature encompassing the intellect, the emotions, and the will, which produces in a person an entirely new life and enables him to live in a totally new sphere.”⁸⁴

13.8 The New Creation

At this point let us once again make ourselves aware that something new has actually and substantially (spiritually) come into being and is now present in the believer. Parallel to the term “new self” there are still other related designations:

“We are *his workmanship* (masterpiece, handiwork), created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). This is more the individual aspect. It shows that just as God put his love, wisdom, and divine power into the first creation, the same is true of the new creation. There his love is expressed even more clearly, for it was not his power but his infinite love that was needed. For the death of his Son (symbolized by the grain of wheat that is sown, the seed for the new life) brings forth the new fruit.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation*; the old has passed away, behold, the *new* has come” (or “everything has become new” [Elb]; 2 Cor 5:17). Indeed, the old has passed away, even if today we still have the old nature in us. The cross is the end of the old self. For God we are already perfect now “in Christ”; he no longer sees the old.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a *new creation*. On all who walk by this rule ...” (Gal 6:15-16; Schl 2000, German Bible translation). The new creation brings with it a different life that is not oriented toward the old creation and the Mosaic law. Rather, this creation equips us from within and shows us how we are to live: For as we have received Christ the Lord, so we are to walk in him (cf. Col 2:6).

Christ is the firstborn of all creation (including the new; Col 1:15); he is its beginning and originator (Col 1:18; Rev 3:14) as the firstborn from the dead. Consequently the new creation clearly goes back to Christ, for it is the result of death having been defeated. It begins beyond death in the power of his

84. Ruth Paxson, *Life on the Highest Plane*, p. 192.

indestructible life (Heb 7:16). That is why the new self in Christ is also, beyond death, indestructible, impossible to lose, imperishable, and eternal.

13.9 What Was Newly Created?

These verses do not say what exactly was newly created. A “parallel person” is not created within the person, so that two personalities would now be present in one human being. At the turning point of salvation in each person’s life, the history – or rather the whole existence – of the old self was brought to an end on the cross at Golgotha. The old and the new self do not go on existing side by side. **The new self has replaced the old self.** The new self is the embodiment of what we have now become in Christ – personally and also together.

For the time being, the new creation is limited to a person’s inner being (which, however, becomes visible in the way he lives). That is why Scripture speaks of an “inner self” (Eph 3:16; Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16; cf. 1 Pet 3:4), which corresponds to the new life and the new self. The body will share in the new creation only at the future transformation or resurrection. In the end nothing is excluded from this new creation, for in the resurrection we will be complete and perfect in every aspect of a humanity as God intended it. Then we will be like the Lord Jesus in body, soul, and spirit – but then not as earthly beings, but like him as heavenly ones.

In summary, one can say that – as far as our personality is concerned – we have on the one hand remained the same and yet at the same time have become completely new. God wants to have us as personalities just as we are (that is, as we were born as his creatures, and as those who possess their own identity). But he accepts us only “in Christ,” that is, only as those who have been placed in Christ. And he has seen to this by placing us into Christ himself (1 Cor 1:30). In doing so he has also “transplanted” us into the whole saving work of Jesus. Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and glorification apply to us, for we have been seated together with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

13.10 Does the New Self Need Renewal?

Both letters (Ephesians and Colossians) emphasize that the new self is constantly being renewed. Is there a danger, then, that it will grow old and weak, or could it even die?

First, a basic remark: Nothing, no creature, exists in itself and of itself. Everything that is created and lives (including the new creation) is upheld and sustained by the Creator (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3; Neh 9:6). That my heart beats (up to 80,000 times every day) is due to God's creation-sustaining power. What has been created is dependent on him! So too is the new self. It is given life by its Creator, Christ.

The inner self must constantly be renewed and given life. The spiritual life of the Christian must be continually nourished. The Christian is to grow ever stronger through God's Spirit. This power works "into the inner self" (so Eph 3:16 literally). This continual renewal and giving of life is necessary because the Christian is still in a mortal and weak body and also still has the remnant of the old life (the old nature) clinging to him, and his thinking is often still influenced by it. We live in the "already" and in the "not yet." Renewal is necessary because the Christian is exposed to the difficulties and hardships of a fallen creation and finds himself in a hostile, seductive world. Not least, renewal and the giving of life are necessary because the enemy of souls, the seducer and murderer from the beginning, opposes the believer.

The Christian finds himself in a field of tension. Our Christian life is attacked every day on various fronts. These attacks have one goal: They want to entice us to conform our lives to the world and to live as the old self lives, namely for itself, without caring about faith and obedience. With the help of the Bible these enemies can be precisely identified: In me is the flesh, the old nature. Outside of me there is the world (people and their world), which does not care about God. And then there is the great enemy, who is called the devil and Satan. Renewal will no longer be necessary in heaven, because these enemies will no longer be there: The flesh will come to an end with our mortal body, the world is passing away along with its desires, and the devil will be crushed under our feet.

"The word 'new' in the expression '*and have put on the new (self)*' is the Greek *neos*; this points not only to a different life but to a life of an entirely new kind, that is, this 'kind of human being' is presented in its youth and freshness, with a living process of growth being assumed. It is about a vigorous young life that takes shape through growth and increase in everyday life. The process of growth is described as a constant renewal in which the Holy Spirit gives this new self (Titus 3:5) a totally new way of thinking and (new) characteristics,

rather than giving the old self a rejuvenation treatment. These characteristics are in accordance with the image of the one who created it, that is, with God himself and with Christ: For both God (Eph 2:10) and Christ (2:15) are responsible for the new self. They want the people who together form this new 'kind of human being' to be more aware of this work of creation – it is a renewal 'in knowledge.' What it is about is the fact that Christ, who dwells in the believers, is everything for them: The 'new self' is Christ as he takes shape in the believers in the full riches of his person, or in short: Christ in the believers."⁸⁵

Knowledge and thinking are renewed. When a person comes to faith, he still has the old sinful patterns of thinking and behavior within him. They also remain in his flesh. But against this stands the working of God's Spirit, and it begins in our control center – at the place where decisions are made. The outer self is wasting away in the wear and tear of daily life. But the word of God assures us that our inner self (that is, the new self) is being renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16). The person concerned experiences renewal by looking into eternity, or rather at Christ himself, whose glory is reflected onto us (2 Cor 3:18) and strengthens us (Col 1:11).

13.11 The New Self: Put On like a Garment

The new self is like a garment that one puts on. The reverse process applies to the old self, which one has taken off like a garment. "The image of 'putting on' and 'taking off' has to do with changing clothes and refers to the change of character in the light of the change of identity, in that the person concerned has exchanged the old realm of life (without God) for a new realm of life (with God)."⁸⁶ The taking off and putting on took place at the turning point of our salvation, when Christ came into our lives.

The old self is in every respect a thing of the past – or is it? All three Bible passages in which the old self is mentioned describe its end: either as "crucified" or as "taken off." All of this stands for a one-time and completed action. Taking off a garment happens at one point in time, whereas renewal is constant. It makes it possible for this new garment to stay new and not wear out or get dirty.

85. G. H. Kramer, *Christus ons leven*, p. 117.

86. Greg Herrick, *Old Man and New Man in Paul*, 1999, p. 7.

Clothes make the man. A garment is what one sees of a person. And that is what Paul wants to say here: It should become clear that the new self was not just a clever idea or theory, but that God's life-creating and renewing power has produced a real masterpiece. The proof of this is that the new self becomes visible in everyday life. He now orients his life toward his Redeemer and Creator. He puts on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14). So it is about the new self becoming more and more visible; Christ (his nature, his love) is to displace the former selfish nature of the old self.

The path of the new self is lined with God's signposts, which show us which forms of expression the new life has and which it does not. The emphasis lies very much on the transformation of one's conduct. The person who comes to faith does not change his life abruptly from old to new. If that were the case, there would be no need for renewal, nor even for the commands of the NT, which show what the life of the new self looks like.

We do not have to *become* new selves, for instance through strained and dogged efforts aimed at a Christlike life. No! It is about putting into practice in our lives what we already *are* in Christ: righteous, holy, and true.

The privilege of being a new self also obliges us to live accordingly. We are to become what we are! To *be* new selves and at the same time to *become* new selves sounds like a paradox, but it is not. The one is the *indicative* of salvation – what we are before God beyond all challenge. The other is the *imperative* of salvation, which calls us to live accordingly out of this being. Neither of these two sides may be set against the other or thrown off balance. Whoever emphasizes the standing, that is, the indicative of salvation, more than its practical realization throws things off balance. Scripture often speaks of both sides in one breath, in order to make clear to us that we should not dissect them with theological contortions (often as a pretext or excuse). For the NT, our standing in salvation is definitely just as important as its effect in everyday life. By the latter is meant the imperative of salvation: to exert ourselves with all our commitment to live as God wants and has also made possible.

13.12 Summary – a Picture

Pictures and comparisons with biblical truths can be very helpful. The Bible itself (above all the Lord Jesus) uses pictures and parables to make spiritual truths understandable. But pictures also have their limits. They are meant to

illustrate certain aspects, which also means that not every aspect present in such a picture fits the truth it is meant to illustrate. What is mentioned in the picture or comparison is significant. What is not mentioned or addressed, on the other hand, is irrelevant.

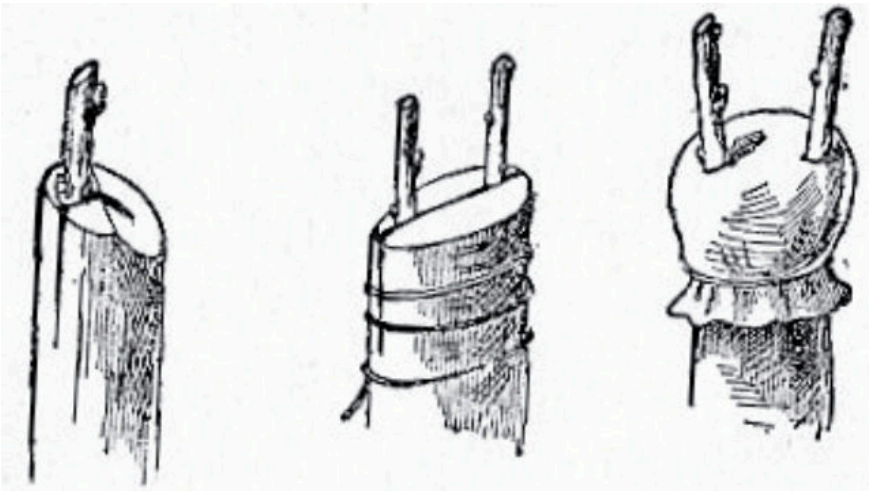
13.12.1 The Old Tree

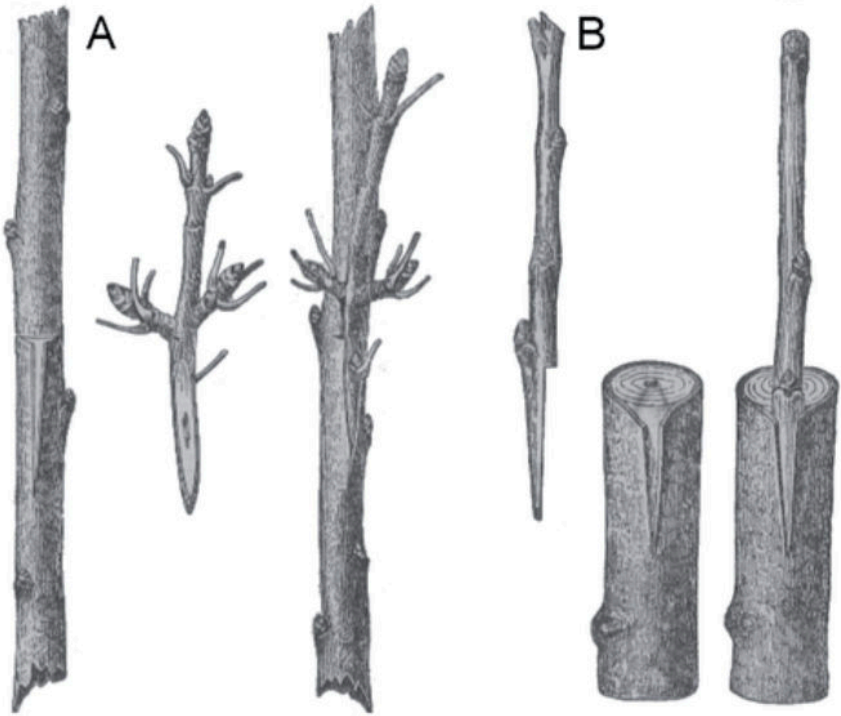
The Bible compares human beings to a tree several times. A classic example is the great king Nebuchadnezzar. He is compared to a large and mighty tree. Because he became proud on account of his greatness and power, God decided to cut it down. Only the stump with its roots was to remain: For the king did not die, but for a time received the heart of an animal, only to become king again afterward (Dan 4; see also Judg 9:7-15). So this tree, figuratively speaking, was cut down with the ax by God himself. This is the picture of a person who lives without God, a descendant of Adam. Jesus says that there is no bad tree that bears good fruit (Luke 6:43). In other words: People who are in the flesh cannot please God. The old self is a tree that does not bear good fruit. This applies to humanity as a whole just as much as to each individual person (Ps 37:35). As far as its fruit is concerned, such a bad tree deserves nothing other than to be cut down and thrown into the fire (Luke 3:9). That is what happened to our old self: It was condemned on the cross, and the death sentence was carried out. It burned, as it were, in the judgment of God's holiness. Our old life was thereby brought to an end. We did not end it ourselves; he did. It was Christ who died for us *as our substitute*. If we had literally died, the root would have been rooted out as well. In our picture the root represents the person. It embodies what I am as a human being, as a creature of God.

13.12.2 A New Tree

Now what is God's goal? God wants me to become a tree planted by streams of water. That is what is said of the righteous in Psalm 1 (cf. Ps 92:12; Jer 17:8). I am to become a good tree that bears good fruit (Matt 7:17), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). For that a new tree is needed. It must be planted and grow. And in order one day to become a strong tree with strong roots and good fruit, care and above all water are necessary. Our picture allows for a further aspect:

We have been born again through the imperishable seed of the word of God (1 Pet 1:23). This seed is God's seed (1 John 3:9), which (figuratively speaking) sprouts and grows in a person after his conversion until it has become a strong tree. This seed is Christ himself (Gal 3:16). With this we have the parallel to the fact that Christ himself is the *new self*, his life in us (Col 3:4, 11). The entire potential for development of the new self is completely contained in this seed, however small it may be. This new self is now to unfold, grow, increase, spread out. That does not happen in a moment, but only through continuous growth and constant renewal. God alone gives the growth, the renewal, and the strength. In another context the NT speaks of an olive tree (Rom 11:16-24) into which another shoot is grafted in order to go on growing on the old tree. Let us picture the tree stump that we have compared to our person. Now the new shoot, that is, the seed of the word (Christ himself), is grafted into this tree stump so that it can grow and become a new tree. Experts call this process "grafting."





13.12.3 The Old Root That Is Still Alive

The old root (the root stump of the old tree that has been cut down) is still there. It is even still alive. In our picture this is not the old self, but rather our flesh – the old, corrupt, and sinful Adamic nature. It shaped our old life, the life of the old self. Even at the risk that repeating these truths may become tiresome, let it be said once more: The old self is not the flesh. Rather, the old self embodies my existence without God before I came to faith. The flesh, on the other hand, represents the nature and character of the old self. This is still present. As long as we live, this old root will be found in us. Now this root has the property of becoming active again (Job 14:7-9). Small shoots grow out of this root stump – bad fruit, works and habits of the body and the flesh. While God takes care of the growth of the new tree, the command goes out to us to put to death our members on earth, that is, the members of the sinful flesh (Col

3:5; Rom 8:13). This is to happen through faith and through the Spirit. We are to remove these shoots like weeds, cut off the branches, or (if they have already become small tree trunks again) fell them with the ax of God's power. The task of a "gardener" who consistently deals with the weeds falls within our area of responsibility. In this work we are not left to ourselves: By the Holy Spirit of God we live and walk (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:18)!

13.13 Only by Faith

This happens only in and through faith in the Son of God, who (as Paul says) "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Faith is dependence on God. It encompasses the attitude that expects everything from Christ and nothing from oneself. The putting to death described, for example, in Romans 8:13 and in Colossians 3:5 ultimately happens *by faith*. This includes saying no to sin while at the same time saying yes to Christ (Rom 6:13, 19). The righteous live (daily) by their *faith* (Rom 1:17). We draw near to God through faith (Rom 5:2); we stand by faith (Rom 11:20; 2 Cor 1:24). I let Christ dwell in my heart through faith (Eph 3:17). I am and become firm through faith (1 Pet 5:9). I must exercise this faith today. That is the key. Faith is not a feeling. For faith, what God says is absolutely true and valid: This concerns not only my eternal salvation but also my daily life. For without faith it is impossible to please God!

13.13.1 The Lazy Gardener

Proverbs 24:30-32 says: "I went past the field of a lazy man, and past the vineyard of a man without understanding. And behold, it was all overgrown with thistles, its ground was covered with weeds, and its stone wall was broken down. And I looked at it, I applied my heart to it; I saw it and received instruction."

Often, right beneath the grafted scion (as this new and noble shoot is called), old shoots grow back. These absolutely must be cut off, for they take the water away from the new shoot and, as growth continues, the light as well.

If the gardener does not fulfill his duties, there is a problem. The flesh's own momentum must not be underestimated. If one nourishes and spares the flesh instead of constantly, or again and again, handing it over to death, the old shoots will grow up in many places. This has negative effects on the growth of

the new tree. Its growth is slowed; the roots no longer grow further into Christ, so that the tree no longer receives nourishment. It is almost as if Paul had the same picture before his eyes (Col 2:7).

A fleshly, selfish life is like a withered tree surrounded by many shoots of the old root, which can grow so tall that the once new tree can no longer be seen. The water intended for this new tree flows into the many shoots of the old tree root. The tree can become sick, while whole branches can wither and its fruit can turn out meager or small.

Some time ago I was surprised when we were gathering and picking apples to have them pressed into juice: On one tree I found two different varieties of apples. That was the result of grafting. The former owner had wanted to have two varieties of apples on one tree. I immediately thought of the Christian life: There, too, two different kinds of fruit are to be found – fruit that the Spirit causes to grow, but also fruit produced by the flesh.

13.14 The Future of the New Self

So far we have seen the new self in the field of tension of the world that is passing away. A brief look at its future should not be missing. The breath of the coming new creation, as described in Revelation 21, is already wafting around the new self. In us this new creation has already dawned. We are a kind of firstfruits of God's new creation (Jas 1:18). In Christ we have already been placed in the heavenly places (in the heavenly sphere) (Eph 2:6). That is how God's word describes our standing. As *new* selves we will live in the *new* creation, one day also with a new body, which will then correspond to the same quality of a new creation as is now the case with regard to our *inner self* (1 Cor 15:35-57). The future of the new self is breathtaking and as exceedingly glorious as its Creator himself: When he, our life, is revealed, then we too will be revealed with him in glory before the whole universe (Col 3:1-4)!

But let us not forget the collective or communal aspect, which is perhaps even the more important one. A new humanity, whose beginning and head is Christ, will be the population of the new heaven and the new earth. Christ is all, and in *all*!

The reality of salvation of the new humanity is embodied by the church of the NT, which came into being only at Pentecost. It (consisting of all believers) will be this new humanity that Christ has created and of which he is the head.

This *one new humanity*, which is made up of all the members of the body, will be for all time – for all eternity – to the praise of the glory, grace, and love of God and of Christ.

The old self is being destroyed by its desires; because of spiritual death it is heading toward physical death, which ultimately leads to eternal death. It does not improve; it is subject to decay and perishes. The new self is renewed through its living union with its Creator until eternal life, or perfection, begins in the resurrection.

13.14.1 Living the Life of the Future Now

The future of the new self is not an abstract topic or one isolated from the reality of our lives. On the one hand this future encompasses our hope, but it also already contains what determines our lives now. One could put it this way: We live from the goal, looking to Jesus and to what he has created and will do. If the life of the new creation is already pulsing in us, then this means nothing other than that we are already living the life of the future now.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit, the unique and exemplary life of Jesus himself, his commandments of love, and all the commands of the NT taken together show us what life in the new creation will look like morally. In God's new creation everything will be filled with God's love – with the same love that we are to put into practice in our lives already now.

Our churches are bridgeheads and outposts of God's new world. Here those who do not know God and redemption in Christ must come into contact with "the new humanity," that is, with the new creation. In us there must become visible what God will soon have everywhere in his new world as the normal and at the same time wonderfully glorious thing.

When we look at God's new world in this way and consider the fact that it has already begun in us, we live the life of the future neither out of or under compulsion nor from legalistic motives. The new way of life is to become normal for us, just as it will soon be in God's eternal glory.

Then, in contrast to today, there will no longer be any enemies and obstacles that can stand in the way of the new life. That is why today it involves decisions of the will, effort, and commitment to become as Jesus was. But we are not dependent on ourselves (as, for example, an unbelieving person who wants to

improve his character morally), but have God's grace and his good Spirit on our side.

13.15 Appeal

Grace instructs us, yes, it trains and brings us up (Titus 2:11-12), so that the new self actually gains room in our everyday lives. It is not the law but grace that trains us, by first reminding us again and again of what we already are in Christ and do not still have to become. Grace places us into the overflowing riches of Christ and fills us with them, for only out of grace is a changed life possible.

We have laid aside the old self with its old way of life. But the mindset, the character, or the nature of this old self remain in us as long as we are in our body. Against a resurgence of the old direction of life stands the constant renewal of our thinking.

Christ in us: That is the reality of life of the new self. Ian Thomas compared this to a glove, which without a living hand is a dead thing. That is what we are – completely incapable without and apart from Christ. But when the living hand goes into the glove, it can do anything! So we may assume and believe that we can do all things through him who strengthens us!

14. Born Again to New Life

At our last mountain peak we come to what is perhaps the best-known matter in this respect. It is about the new birth, about receiving a new and eternal life. With this we come to what we can learn from the apostle John about the transforming power of the gospel, which creates something new. We have been set free from the power of sin, we have been given the Holy Spirit, we have been made new selves. That was especially Paul's theme. But we also had to be born again, because our old life proved useless because of sin and we therefore had no real life – that is, we were spiritually dead.

But first let us look at a term that we have already used several times: the “*new and old nature*.” Even if these terms do not appear as such in the Bible, the thing they stand for is nevertheless found there. What we call the “*new nature*,” in contrast to the “*old nature*” (that is, the *flesh*), is nothing other than the “*divine nature*.” Peter writes in his second letter, chapter 1:4:

“... so that through these (promises) you may become partakers of the divine nature.”

It always helps to keep in view the context in which the terms are embedded. At this point it is as follows:

The Christian has received everything from God in order to be able to live for him. First of all, life itself. This can be called the life of the new self. To put this divine life into practice in everyday life means “godliness” (proper reverence; a life in keeping with God), that is, a life to the glory of God. Through his word God has shown us his own glory, which has gripped us and brought about the complete determination to keep him himself before our eyes as the goal of our life and of our life's journey. This journey goes through the world – not only through God's creation, but also through the world changed and corrupted by human beings, that is, the society in which we live. As recipients and partakers of the divine nature we have escaped the corruption of the world. With the divine nature we are now able to live differently from the world, which is marked by sinful desire. Here it also becomes clear what this divine nature is and what it is not. It does not concern God's outward glory, but God's moral nature. It is a spiritual, supernatural life that bears within itself the

moral and ethical characteristics of God, which Peter here contrasts with the goings-on of the lost world.

This nature expresses itself concretely in a dynamic process in the course of which the one who has been born again applies all diligence and bears spiritual fruit. In this way he makes his divine calling and election sure. Thus he confirms in his life God's saving work in him. "To become partakers of the divine nature" means not only to *possess* something, but likewise to *become* something: It is about becoming like God and thus becoming his imitators.

The proof that the nature or character of God can actually enter into a human being and shape a person's life is Jesus himself. In him is the divine life; he himself is eternal life. He became man so that this life would become accessible and something we human beings could experience. That is why John can say: "... which is true in him and in you" (1 John 2:8).

14.1 What, Then, Is Nature?

By *nature* is meant the essence or natural constitution that characterizes a thing from its beginning or a living being from birth. Animal nature is different from human nature (Jas 3:6-7). In our context, nature encompasses something that one has received – as distinct from what one has produced oneself. The word *nature* (Gk. *physis*) means "that which has come to be"⁸⁷; the verb means *to bring forth, develop, sprout, and grow* (especially of plants); the noun also means *origin and birth*.

We human beings are *by nature* – that is, from birth and according to our essence and our nature – children of wrath (Eph 2:3; Gal 2:15). In nature the law holds that each kind brings forth its own offspring. The same is true of human beings: It applies to the body, the outer self, just as much as to the heart, the inner self. Even today, in the 21st century, the human being still embodies the nature of Adam (the first created human being), but also what Adam became through his fall into sin. We distinguish between the human nature mentioned by James (what we have consequently become as God's creatures in his image) and the sinful nature that we have inherited from Adam (after the Fall). In other words: "We must distinguish between the nature of man and our

87. Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Gk. *phyein*).

nature as fallen men.⁸⁸ We are human beings and always will be, whatever change we may undergo through the new birth with regard to spirit and soul, and whatever change awaits our body at the moment the Lord comes to call us to himself. We will never lose the essential identity with which God first created us (through birth). We are and remain the same persons – the same individuals. That is why we must distinguish between such terms as ‘our human nature,’ ‘our fallen nature,’ ‘our new nature.’ The Fall did not abolish (the nature of) our humanity; our new birth, on the other hand, does not abolish our humanity. What is essential to being human we will never lose, and our individuality will never be changed.”⁸⁹

The fallen Adamic nature sketches the human reality that is no longer determined by the human spirit and its connection to God (in contrast to the animal, which has no spirit), but by the soul and the body. The human spirit houses a person’s awareness of God and his fundamental ability to recognize the existence of a Creator, as well as his ability to believe in him, to pray to him, to seek him, and to honor him. But this function has suffered massive damage through sin. The spirit has not been extinguished, but its function is no longer directed toward the living God. Paul describes the consequence like this: “The *natural* (Gk. *psychikos*, actually *soulish*) person ... does not accept the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). The Fall has affected every aspect of human reality. “The bond (to the Creator in) affection, reverence, and dependence that kept him close to God is broken; he is like a house whose roof has collapsed and fallen to the ground. Named after the lowest aspect to which spirit and soul have sunk, he is ‘flesh.’ Thus ‘flesh’ is the scriptural designation of his old or fallen nature.”⁹⁰

14.2 Partakers of God’s Nature

With the *old nature* we belonged to the world, where not Christ but Satan rules. But with the receiving of the new life we have escaped the corruption of the world and its defilements (2 Pet 1:4; 2:18, 20). With our body we are still in the world. So we live in two worlds at the same time (Eph 2:6; Col 2:20; 3:1-5).

88. This distinction can be illustrated very well by the person of Jesus: In his becoming flesh (incarnation) he took on human nature, but not the old and therefore sinful nature.

89. F. W. Grant, *The two Natures*, p. 5.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

With the divine life we belong to God's new world, to his new creation, which has been created in and through Christ.

Our self-determined life has come to an end; our "Me, Inc." has gone under; the enterprise of our life, or of our self-centered world, is bankrupt. The insolvency proceedings were settled at Golgotha. Christ has paid the debts. But now we are partakers in God's life; we now have "secure shares"; we are "shareholders," because we have a share in God's life. With these "shares" there is a real new beginning, because God himself is their originator.

14.3 Eternal Life Is the Life of Christ

We have literally received a share in God's life, a share in his eternal life. Ultimately this is nothing other than the fact that Christ himself as a person is our new life (this merely expresses another aspect of the same thing). Just as he himself is the new self to which we have been created, he embodies our new life.

The fact that we possess the divine life does not raise us to the position of gods. Just as little do we become Christ when Christ becomes our life. We remain creatures, human beings in God's image, who because of this life can now once again be in fellowship with God. We have life "*in Christ*," who is its originator and on whom we are dependent. We do not possess this life detached from him.

14.4 How Do We Become Partakers of the Divine Life?

The word *nature* has to do with birth and growth and directs our attention to what Jesus explained to the scribe Nicodemus: the *new birth*.

At its core it is about the new birth, through which we become partakers of the divine nature. *New birth* (German *Wiedergeburt*, which also means "rebirth") is a biblical term that has nothing to do with Far Eastern religion, with the "eternal cycle of coming into being and passing away" (as, for example, in Buddhism), or with any worldview of whatever kind. The new birth is addressed by several authors in the NT, but it is described in greatest detail by the apostle John. While our transfer from Adam to Christ has various aspects, it is John in particular who describes the aspect of the new birth. The new birth creates a new, different life. It differs from the life we have inherited by nature (from Adam).

All the writers of the NT have made their contributions with a view to how one receives new life and how it expresses itself in everyday life. What they all have in common is that being a Christian means a change in a person that the person does not bring about himself, but that comes from above, from God himself. With this we are already in the middle of our topic. “From above” is exactly the word that Jesus uses in connection with the new birth.

14.5 The New Birth – Born of God

Nicodemus wanted to talk with Jesus about theological questions. But the Lord Jesus had no time for that. For him the necessity of a new birth was more important. With this the Lord Jesus says in one sentence that what a person is by virtue of his birth (by nature) cannot see the kingdom of God, let alone gain access to it (John 3:1-36). The necessity of a new birth leaves nothing good about what we are by nature. That applies to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, as well. Jesus tells him that this birth does not take place through human procreation, but “of water and the Spirit.” It is not a matter of natural reproduction, but of a working from above, from God. The children of God are born not of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13). One becomes a child of God only through the new birth! A person could be fathered hundreds of times by a physical father and born of his mother, and the result would always be the same: What is born of the flesh is flesh. If a person is to be born again, the origin must therefore be sought somewhere else entirely. But how is this wondrous birth brought about? Concretely, it happens of water and the Spirit, as the Lord Jesus says (John 3:5).

14.5.1 Born of Water

This is about neither a literal birth nor the instruments used at a birth. So water must stand for a figurative meaning. What does water symbolize? Water symbolizes God’s word, as Paul writes to the Ephesians: “... by the washing with water through the word” (5:26). The word of God is a concrete instrument in the new birth:

“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.”

Jas 1:18

“... since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” (see also 1:3)

1 Pet 1:23

“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”

John 15:3

The water is the word of God and its cleansing power. It is made alive by the Spirit of God and works upon the sinner. The word of God, whether proclaimed, testified to, or read, exposes sin and leads to repentance and faith. Receiving and accepting Jesus Christ in faith brings about the new birth (John 1:12). Faith is the result of the proclamation of the word of God (Rom 10:17). As God's seed, the word brings forth the new life.

The word, the imperishable seed, brings about at least two things: It brings forth a life that, like the word itself, is imperishable (that is, eternal). And it produces a life that has exactly the characteristics that the word of God has. The word of God is the DNA of the new life. The seed contains all the information about what the plant or the living being that is conceived will look like. In the same way, God's word is the blueprint, the “whole genetic code,” of the new life. This word, which we can read, shows how this life is realized and expressed. In this sense James says that we were brought forth by the word of truth and that this word is at the same time the seed that has been planted in us so that it can grow (Jas 1:18, 21). The nature of the seed determines the form of the life. The divine nature is perfect or complete in itself (which also applies to the seed in question), but in us it can and is to take shape and increase.

Before we come to the second instrument, after the preceding reflections it will suffice to point out that water baptism is not being spoken of here. The water of water baptism does not bring forth a new self and does not make us children of God. Rather, water baptism unites us *outwardly* (in our confession) with Christ.

14.5.2 Born of the Spirit

It is not the human spirit that is born again. Nor is it the human spirit that brings about the new birth. Rather, it is God's Holy Spirit by whom the new birth is set in motion and carried out.

What is born of the Spirit is spirit. It is true that the gift of the new birth is not a matter of new life in a physical or biological sense. It is a spiritual life in contrast to the natural existence of the unredeemed person. But it also corresponds to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, because it is divine life. The new life corresponds to the nature of the Holy Spirit, for we have become partakers of the divine nature (of the divine life).

Despite his learning, Nicodemus is out of his depth. He could have known from the OT what “water and Spirit” bring about when both act upon a person through God’s working!

14.5.3 Ezekiel’s Prophecy: New Hearts and a New Spirit

It was Ezekiel who did not speak of the *new birth* in the literal sense, but who nevertheless meant the same process, in which water and Spirit would be applied. God will do the following (Ezek 11:19; 36:25-27):

- sprinkle clean water on the Israelites in order to cleanse them
- give them a new heart and a new spirit
- give them a heart of flesh in place of a heart of stone
- God’s Spirit will be put within them so that they live by God’s statutes.

Important elements of divine salvation in the new birth are named here. First there is the cleansing, which closes the book on the past. In place of the old life, for which cleansing was necessary, there now come a new heart and a new spirit.

Both the expression “heart” in particular and the term “spirit” (in the sense of “human spirit”) refer to the innermost being of the person concerned (Prov 4:23). It is about the center of the human personality, which must be completely transformed. Through this transformation a person does not become without a will of his own, but rather is enabled by it to do God’s will. The heart of stone is a hardened heart – a dead heart that cannot and will not live toward God. When a person’s will is renewed, he needs strength to be able actually to do God’s will. He receives God’s Spirit, through whom he is enabled actually to live according to God’s commandments.

Here, too, it becomes clear that a person is changed from within and not through commandments that are imposed on him from outside and lead only to

an outward change of behavior. People can change their behavior with hard discipline, but the Christian behaves differently because he has received a new heart and God's Spirit. The new obedience is a matter of the heart for him. Discipline is important here as well, but not decisive.

What is born of the Spirit is spirit! Even Ezekiel already distinguishes between the "new spirit," which corresponds to the new life, and the Holy Spirit as a person who dwells in the one who has been born again. Even if Jesus does not speak directly with Nicodemus about the gift of the Holy Spirit, it is nevertheless included here. John mentions the Spirit several times as our possession (John 7:39; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13).

Paul takes up Ezekiel's words and explains that they are valid for us as well: God's Spirit writes on our hearts, which, unlike the tablets of the law, are not of stone but of flesh. This presupposes that our hearts, too, have been completely transformed. This "working" of God on our hearts shows once again what God does to change us more and more into the image of his Son. His writing on our hearts has a goal: We are to be transformed morally into the same image of Christ glorified on God's throne – and that by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:3, 18).

14.6 Rescued from Death to Life: Made Alive

The new birth is not necessary because we have no life, but because we lack the *right* life. What is born of the flesh is flesh and therefore useless. We must be born of the Spirit. Only in this way do we enter the kingdom of God and come into possession of heavenly things.

But logically the result of a birth is also life that did not exist before. Thus the Lord Jesus says that he will bring people from death to life already now. He will do this here and now (not only in the future): "An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who have heard will live" (John 5:25). Just as the word of God is the seed of the new birth, so here it is the word (the voice of the Son) that makes alive. By nature a person is not only a sinner (that is, a being ruled by the flesh, good for nothing). He is also a dead person who needs life. By nature he is dead in his sins (Eph 2:1; Col 2:13, and elsewhere). Death always means the separation of things that by nature belong together. So a person may be very much alive biologically and mentally, but *in the spiritual sense*, as far as his connection to God is concerned, he is dead. This relationship, with everything that belongs to such a relationship, is

not present. Through *spiritual* raising (or making alive, which ultimately encompasses another aspect of the new birth) the spiritually dead sinner receives eternal life. His alienation from the life of God (Col 1:21; cf. Eph 4:18) is thereby removed. Through this life the relationship with God is not only restored and brought to the level of Adam's relationship with God before his fall. Rather, a relationship is thereby formed that makes us children and sons of God. We have passed from death to life! "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63), says the Lord Jesus.

14.7 The Mystery of Becoming and Growing

It is helpful to make some general observations about the process of the new birth. The Bible does not say in which part of the human being eternal life is located when God gives it to a person. Some speak of it being in our spirit; others emphasize the soul. It is tempting to assign the processes of salvation that take place in a person to the individual aspects of human existence. But the Bible is not a textbook of anthropology, neither of the old nor of the new self.⁹¹ With the new birth we are dealing with a mystery that is partly revealed but to a certain extent also hidden, which is due to the complexity of human nature. This shows once again the limits of our knowledge, but it takes nothing away from the fact that we actually possess God's eternal (spiritual) life as our own life. The Lord Jesus himself compares the process of the new birth, which is brought about by the Spirit, to the wind: One can indeed hear its sound (that is, one can perceive its effects in the person in whom the Spirit is at work). But one cannot see where it comes from and where it goes (John 3:8). For us the new birth is a hidden process that can be made visible neither by our knowledge nor by technology.

The process of growth of the new life is not described in detail either, but is assumed as a given. Almost all the writers of the NT assure us that there is growth and (constant) renewal, movement, as well as progress and increasing maturity in faith (John 3:30; Eph 4:13; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18; Col 1:10; 3:10; 1 John 2:12-17; Gal 4:19; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:16; Eph 4:23). This is described more or less in principle. It is always about a process that on the one hand is set

91. Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf, *And Yet the Dead Live (Und die Toten leben doch)*, chapter 3 (The Biblical View of the Human Being), pp. 147ff.

in motion and carried on by God himself, but that on the other hand can be realized only through our participation, our consent and decision, and our discipline and consistency in following Christ's commands (Luke 8:15; 2 Pet 1:8; Jas 3:18; Titus 3:14). The process of transformation always takes place according to the principles mentioned. But in the many millions of Christians it takes place at different speeds and with different intensity (owing to the differences among these Christians in their essential makeup, their life situation, and also their commitment). The divine Gardener lovingly takes care of each individual plant (Heb 12:11; John 15:2) – with the one great goal for all of them, that they be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). If this is *God's* greatest goal, then it must also be our greatest concern. This fellowship with God, or this agreement to have the same goal, will simplify much in our lives and give us a greater sense of direction. In this way we will gain an entirely different – namely a divine – view of our daily life situation.

It is God's wisdom alone that brings about both the *coming into being* of the new life and its *growth*. What is decisive is the result by which God's working is recognized, namely the good fruit of the Spirit in the changed lives of Christians.

14.8 Growth – Life Grows

Growth is a tremendously important thing. God's life is perfect in itself, but when it is placed into a human being, it is meant to grow. It must also permeate the whole person in practice. The new life changes a person's behavior, his knowledge, and his character more and more from the old life toward the new life (that is, the nature of Jesus Christ takes shape in him more and more; Gal 4:19; 2 Cor 3:18).

Let us look at nature in the wild. There are no wheat fields there. They exist only where people have laid them out and sown the appropriate seed. So too in our old life we produced only thorns and thistles (Eph 5:11). But now the seed of the word is being scattered, and good grain grows, fruit for God (Matt 13:23; Rom 6:22; 7:4). The seed sprouts in the fertile "soil of the heart." In this way the new life from God changes a person. The result of what happened inwardly, and what continues to happen from then on, can be seen in the behavior of the person who has been born again: He is now oriented toward the one who gave birth to him.

In the person into whom the seed is sown, evil still exists, just as one can still discover more or fewer thistles and thorns in a wheat field. But the new life, the new fruit, is also an overcoming life (1 John 5:4). In it the changes in the newborn can unfold: He has now become an imitator of God, who gave him life. While the good soil brings forth good fruit, in the field of our life we remove what is not good fruit: thorns of our old and sinful behavior, and thistles, which have long and deep roots and stand for old, stubborn habits. Some weeds require hard discipline and perseverance before they are rendered harmless, but these efforts are worthwhile when we submit to the goal that God has for us. Stones lying around in the field of our life are unnecessary burdens and weights; sometimes they are sins that so easily entangle, which slow down and hinder our growth and progress (Isa 5:1-7; Heb 12:1).

It is astonishing how significant a place growth occupies in the Bible and how often it is applied to human beings. Israel was the vineyard of the LORD and was supposed to bear good fruit. God himself is the vinedresser.

It is important to tend the vineyard of our life, our “own vineyard” (Song 1:6), well. Christ is the vine, and we are the branches on it, in order to bear fruit for the Father (John 15:1-8).

Spiritual growth is a normal process, just as it takes place in nature and also in our human nature. This growth needs time and all the necessary conditions. Growth does not happen in leaps, and there are no shortcuts either – through whatever things and experiences. “Nowhere in Scripture is it taught that there is a sudden leap from carnality to spirituality, or from a comparatively careless life to a life of devotion to Christ. On the contrary, growth in godliness is presented as growth that should be as normal and natural as the normal development of a human being from a child to a mature, grown-up person.”⁹²

With greenhouses one can escape the laws of the seasons and harvest many plants and kinds of vegetables in any season. But we all know that in a greenhouse one can never grow plants of the quality that outdoor plants achieve. This also applies to the taste of the fruit of plants grown in a greenhouse. Likewise, spiritual fruit grows best in everyday life. Out in open nature, where it is exposed to wind and weather, warmth and cold, drought and rain, fruit has the best conditions for growth. We do not want to become “hothouse Christians.”

92. Henry Allen Ironside, *Heiligung – Zerrbild und Wirklichkeit* (Holiness: The False and the True), p. 153.

14.9 Cultivating

“Cultivating” means, for example, laying out a wheat field where before there was forest or steppe. In the context of “bearing fruit,” Paul says (Phil 2:12-13):

*“Work out your own salvation
with fear and trembling;
for it is God who works in you
both to will
and to work,
for his good pleasure.”*

Probably no other word of the Bible shows so briefly and concisely our responsibility to act and at the same time God’s working in our acting. While we “work,” God is at work at the same time. Salvation obliges us to act: For we are to provide the proof of the salvation we have obtained – indeed, to bring it to completion. This word of the Bible contains a great tension between our responsibility and God’s working. But we must not simply resolve this tension by thinking that salvation is to be seen as separate from our working and has nothing to do with our own efforts. Let us take God’s word as it is! Even with fear and trembling (that is, with the awareness that we can make mistakes) we are to live out salvation and take seriously the often-mentioned “imperative of salvation.” Once we have reached the goal, we will recognize that in all our commitment it was God in his grace who brought everything about.

But what is the connection between this verse and spiritual growth? The term “work out” was also used in the Greek language for agriculture, that is, for working farmland. This confirms for us: God has planted his word in our heart; new life has been imparted to us. We must now tend and cultivate this field of the new life: In doing so we are to remove everything that disturbs and provide everything that promotes growth. In addition, we are to make sure that a good harvest can be brought in. Our life is like the field – meant, of course, in a figurative sense. This work of the farmer is in turn the work of God himself. Trusting in God, who works and wants to work everything, we cultivate what God has created in us.

The things of the world make the soil of the heart hard and unreceptive to God’s speaking. Ground that has been hard up to now must be laboriously

loosened so that it can absorb water and bear fruit again. The weeds of evil and impure thoughts, too, must be constantly removed. Young plants are easier to get rid of than old ones with deep roots. So let us take action against them immediately and constantly!⁹³

14.10 Hobby or Duty?

The hobby gardener takes care of the weeds because having a beautiful garden simply happens to be his hobby. He does not have to do it; no one forces him to. When we apply the picture of the gardener or the farmer to our sanctification, it is not an option that we can take up or also neglect. Deciding for a life of sanctification and for spiritual growth is not just something for a special class of Christians who want to go into missions or become preachers. Rather, salvation obliges us to pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. However unfamiliar it may sound to some: Without holiness in our lives we will not see the Lord in the end (Heb 12:14)!

“For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned” (Heb 6:7-8).

14.11 The Indicative of Salvation in John

The life of God (eternal life) is John’s theme. He also deals with the new birth, through which we receive this life. In his three letters we want to gather together what we have become as children of God and what has been given to us. With him the *indicative* of salvation means the following (note the many parallels to Paul):

- fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3)
- complete joy (1:4)
- We walk in the light (1:7; 2:9-11).
- He, the Son of God, laid down his life for us (3:16).
- The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1:7).
- He is the propitiation for our sins (2:2; 4:10).
- Our sins are forgiven (2:12).

93. C. G. Willis, *Betrachtungen über den Brief an die Philipper*, p. 184.

- Our sins have been taken away (3:5).
- constant forgiveness (after confession) and cleansing from unrighteousness (1:9)
- We have an advocate (helper) with the Father when we have sinned (2:1).
- In us the love of God is truly perfected (2:5; 4:12, 17).
- The love of the Father has been given to us (3:1).
- God loves us (4:16).
- We are *in him* (2:5).
- We are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ (5:20).
- What is true in him is just as true in us, namely the divine life (2:8).
- We abide forever (2:17).
- We have the Holy Spirit, the anointing from the Holy One (2:20, 27).
- He has given us his Spirit (3:24; 4:13).
- We are in the Father and in the Son (2:24).
- his promise to us: eternal life (2:25)
- God has given us eternal life; this life is in his Son (5:11, 13).
- We have the Son and with him life (5:12).
- Eternal life abides (that is, dwells) in us (3:15).
- We are born of God (2:29; 3:9; 4:4, 6-7; 5:1, 3, 18-19; 3 John 11).
- We are children of God (3:1).
- God's seed is in us (3:9).
- We will be like the Son of God (3:2).
- We will see the Son of God as he is (3:2).
- We have passed from death to life (3:14).
- We are in him, and he is in us (3:24; 4:4).
- We have life through the Son (4:9).
- We have confidence on the day of judgment (4:17).
- Fear has been taken from us by God's perfect love (4:18).
- We pray with confidence and according to his will (5:14-15).
- We are chosen (2 John 13).
- The divine truth abides (as does the Spirit of God) in us and with us forever (2 John 2).

14.12 The Imperative of Salvation in John

Where blessings and privileges are to be found, there are also duties and responsibility. Now this insight is not new, but this compilation speaks to us:

- keep his commandments (2:3-4; 3:22; 5:2-3; 2 John 5)
- keep his word (2:5)
- obliged to walk as he walked (2:6; cf. 4:17)
- love one's brother (2:10; 3:10, 14; 2 John 5)
- not love the world (2:15)
- overcome the world by faith (5:4)
- confess the Son (2:23)
- abide in him (2:28)
- practice righteousness (2:29)
- purify oneself as he, the Son of God, is pure (3:3)
- not practice sin (3:6, 9; 5:18)
- lay down our lives for the brothers and open our hearts to them (3:16-17)
- love one another in deed and in truth (3:18; 4:7; 4:11)
- abide in love (4:16)
- do what is pleasing before God (3:22)
- We love because he first loved us (4:19).
- walk in truth (2 John 4; 3 John 4)
- watch ourselves so that we do not lose what we have worked for (2 John 8)
- abide in the teaching of Christ (2 John 9)
- hold fast to the truth (3 John 3)
- give lodging to servants of God (3 John 5-8)
- do good and imitate what is good (3 John 11).

14.13 Eternal Life – Quality and Quantity

The new life has a dimension that overshadows everything before it and everything people have thought possible. Eternal life is not simply endless existence. Every human being has that, including those who are not born again. Rather, through the new birth we receive an existence that enables us one day to be in heaven and thus where eternal life is “at home.” But John's message is about the fullness of this life shaped by heaven, which we carry within us not only then, but already now, while we are still on earth. The fullness, the riches,

and the content of this life are to be found in us now. With this, not merely an existence has come into being, but a new self with everything that makes up a human being: will, love, knowledge, and much more. With this life we have received the knowledge of the Father (John 17:3). We have entered into a living, close relationship and fellowship with the Father and the Son, marked by love. This would never be possible if we did not have the same life that the Father and the Son have.

14.14 Signs of Life

Anyone who was able to be present at the birth of their children knows what I mean. Everyone waits eagerly for the child's first sounds. When it then cries, the miracle of birth is complete. In the spiritual life there are such signs of life as well. Shortly after speaking of the new birth (1 Pet 1:23), Peter says that like newborn infants we should long for the pure milk of the word of God (1 Pet 2:2). In other words: A person who has been born again hungers for, or is interested in, God's word. He can no longer be without God's word, because it is like food to him. Further signs of life, which we have already listed among the imperatives of salvation, are:

- The one born of God practices righteousness (1 John 2:29).
- The one born of God loves and knows God (1 John 4:7).
- The one born of God believes that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1).
- The one born of God loves his brothers and sisters in the faith (1 John 5:1).
- The one born of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

We will examine one mark of the new life in more detail (1 John 3:6, 9; 5:18):

*“Everyone who abides in him
does not sin;
everyone who sins
has neither seen him
nor known him.”*

*“Everyone who is born of God
does not practice sin,
for his seed abides in him;
and he cannot sin,
because he is born of God.”*

*“We know
that everyone
who is born of God
does not sin.”*

14.15 The One Born of God Does Not Sin

This is a sign of life that at first glance makes us puzzled and possibly sad as well. Does John mean to say that the Christian can never sin again? If he meant that, he would have contradicted himself; for in chapter 2:1 he writes:

*“My little children, I am writing these things to you
so that you may not sin;
and if anyone has sinned –
we have an advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous.”*

Even before that he says:

*“If we say we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
If we confess our sins,
he is faithful and just
to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
1 John 1:8-9

If John urges us not to sin, then obviously the possibility exists that the person concerned can still sin and has not become sinless. Our daily experience, unfortunately, is also irrefutable proof that this is the case. But John’s standard or measure clearly consists in our *not* sinning (at all); he does not say, as we would probably put it: “Try to sin as little as possible!” Rather, John derives the standard for our life from what Jesus himself said about God, namely that “God is light (absolutely holy and righteous), and in him is no darkness (sin) at all” (1 John 1:5). When he says at the beginning, “If anyone has sinned ...,” it becomes clear that he is speaking here not of the rule but of the exception. We do not need to perform contortions in order to bring these words into harmony with those that say that the one born of God does not sin or (put even more

clearly) *cannot* sin. These words, which seem so contradictory, must be compatible with one another.

Here John sees us as those to whom the power and the nature of the new life have been imparted. In his eyes we are here the ones who possess this life, which came into being through the divine seed of the word. And this necessarily has the following consequence: The Christian does not sin continually (this would be the grammatical form of the durative) and not out of habit. To speak with Paul, he has been set free from the power of sin. “Although the believer sometimes sins, it is not sin but the opposite of sin that is the ruling principle of his life. We are children of God, and sin is abnormal and unnatural for us.”⁹⁴ The Christian loves God and his commandments. It belongs to his very nature that he hates sin. He lives and walks by the Spirit so as not to gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16, 25).

Some explain this as follows: John means exclusively the new life (the life of Christ in him), which cannot sin. This explanation is only partly correct. Of course this life cannot sin. But here it is not about the activities of the new life, but about the behavior of the *person* who is born of God. The new life in itself does not *do* anything. Rather, the person concerned *does* something in accordance with his life, with his nature. The person *does* something in full responsibility and by his own decision, while his life or nature determines the origin of the act – that is, the source from which the person draws. It is the seed through which the person concerned was born again, and this seed is at the same time the new life. John now sees the person who has been born again as the one who leads this life, or who is determined and characterized by this life. Sin does not fit into this life; it is a foreign body. “John’s letter contains sharp contrasts. It also contains many abstract statements. It is the same with sin and righteousness. What is characteristic of a thing is always brought out. Thus the believer is righteous by nature: He practices righteousness and does not sin. This means, however, that the character of his life is good: He lives righteously, and consequently he does not live sinfully. For the unbeliever the opposite applies.”⁹⁵

John does not speak of an ideal as it *could* be, but of how it *is*. Sometimes one can get the impression that he simply passes over the distinction between

94. Alfred Plummer, in John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, p. 138.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

standing and practical *state* (an aid to understanding that we have used especially in Paul's teaching on salvation). That is why this statement is not only "theoretically," positionally, or objectively true, but actually describes what we also are in practice in our everyday lives (imperative of salvation). It goes beyond what we have become by grace in our standing (indicative of salvation).

14.15.1 Four Stages in Salvation History: Humanity and Sin

In his dispute with Pelagius,⁹⁶ Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) made the following classification using three Latin terms: *posse* (for "to be able, to have the power, to be capable"), *peccare* (for "to sin, to err, to transgress"), and *non* (for "not").

14.15.2 No Longer Sinning: Possible or Impossible?

It is obvious: John knows the fact that a believer "is able to sin." He does not rule it out. Sinning is not the rule in a Christian's life. What is normal is that the Christian does not sin, because God's power has given him everything that serves a life of godliness through the knowledge of God (2 Pet 1:3). "The true Christian is not someone who has lost the ability to sin, but the will and the readiness to do so."⁹⁷

John was not speaking of the possibility of sinlessness and perfection (otherwise he would contradict himself in a striking way). Sinlessness as such is impossible if only because sin dwells in us and is inseparably interwoven with our body and our earthly existence. That we no longer sin is something to strive for today (cf. John's words: "... so that you may not sin"), but it is possible only in glory, when we are completely like him, our Lord.

1. Humanity before the Fall 2. Fallen humanity 3. The person born again 4. Humanity in the consummation

Posse	peccare	Non	posse	Posse	non	Non	posse	peccare
		Non	peccare	peccare				

96. British monk who, as a contemporary of Augustine, rejected his teaching on grace and salvation and instead emphasized the freedom of the human will.

97. William MacDonald, *Der vergessene Befehl – Seid heilig* (The Forgotten Command: Be Holy), p. 45.

He is not able

He was able to sin not to sin; he is able not to sin. He is no longer able to sin.
(but also to avoid sin (but also to sin).
it). of not sin).
sinning.

Because of free flesh, sold will, man could under sin. decide to respect God's of fallen man commandment or is a sin, but to break it. he cannot live without sin.	He is in the Not every act to sin is broken. He has been put in a position not to sin, but he can still sin.	Spiritually, the new and the old life are in him. The compulsion to sin is broken. He has been put in a position not to sin, but he can still sin.	Sin and the flesh, the old nature, were bound in the Christian to his earthly, bodily existence in the old creation, which comes to an end in the consummation and is replaced by the body of glory and by constant nearness to Christ.
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Must we now be disappointed because of our experience – knowing that we can never reach this goal? Or is there a reason in Scripture that confirms to us that we will *not* manage to be without sin? Such a statement would very much surprise us. How is one supposed to encourage the Christian not to sin on the one hand and at the same time make clear to him that this will never work? That does not fit together, and it would be very unwise from a teaching point of view. The standard for our life is always God's perfection, never anything less.

But if someone seriously believes that he has reached the state of perfection (a life without sin), he has probably lost sight and all sense of the nature of sin and of reality. His conscience is no longer sensitive to it. Even in much of the good that we do, a shadow of sin can often still be seen. Whoever claims no longer to sin must provide the proof and bring forward "witnesses" to his sinlessness: his spouse, his children, and other people in his immediate surroundings. I know of only one for whom this is true: Jesus. At this point I add the often-used saying, which is true in every respect: "Christians can disappoint, Christ never." It is meant not as an excuse but as an encouragement.

14.16 Perfection – What Is It?

The NT often speaks of perfection, including when it comes to our life of faith. This does not mean flawlessness or sinlessness. For our understanding of

sanctification it is important to understand this perfection correctly. We can distinguish at least three meanings of this term in the passages of Scripture where it occurs:

14.16.1 The Perfection of Our Standing in Salvation

“For by *a single* offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Through the perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus we have been set free from our sins forever. That is an unchangeable, flawless salvation, perfect from God’s point of view. We have been washed, sanctified, justified (1 Cor 6:11). In God’s new creation (2 Cor 5:17) we are perfect (1 Cor 2:6; Phil 3:15). In Christ we have been brought to fullness, or made complete (Col 2:10).

This perfection encompasses a gift of grace and God’s saving work. “This given perfection must not be confused with absolute sinlessness or ethical perfection; but there is no growth toward moral perfection and maturity if the foundational perfection is lacking.”⁹⁸

14.16.2 Perfection (Maturity) in Our Lives: Growing Up

While the first meaning does indeed refer to flawless and unchangeable perfection, the NT also uses this term for a reality that has come into being and is in the process of growth or progress. Its goal is perfection (Gk.: maturity), namely the maturity of spiritual adulthood. This meaning of the word *perfect* is found in 1 Corinthians 14:20. There it is said that the Corinthians in their gatherings should not be children in their thinking, but perfect, that is, grown-up, mature. The church as a whole is to attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the grown-up (perfect or mature) man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13). Thus the *solid* food of biblical teaching is intended for the grown-up (the perfect, the mature), who because of practice have their senses trained – to distinguish both good and evil (cf. Heb 5:14).

When Jesus commissions us to become perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48), this reveals two things: On the one hand it shows God’s

98. Erich Mauerhofer, *Der Kampf zwischen Fleisch und Geist bei Paulus*, p. 124.

perfection, and on the other hand the process in our lives of becoming like our Father, because we are his imitators.

14.16.3 Complete Perfection in the Future Consummation

Our faith has a goal: to be with Christ and to be completely like him. What else can be called perfect or complete, if not our being like him? Paul pursued this complete oneness with Christ, even in his resurrection, but he had not yet attained it: “Not that I have already obtained this (the resurrection from the dead and thus the redemption of the body as well) or am already perfect (have reached perfection, that is, been brought to the goal)” (Phil 3:12). The day of our transformation or resurrection will make us perfect (bring us to the goal, complete us) in spirit, soul, and body (cf. Col 1:28).

14.17 Responsibility for What We Do, Not for What We Are

Sometimes we say of someone, “He acted according to his nature.” By that we mean that he himself did not decide whether and what he would do, because he was driven by his nature. On the day of judgment people will not be judged according to what they were by nature, but according to what they did on their own responsibility and quite consciously (Rom 2). This applies to the believer as well. When he sins, he cannot excuse it by saying that it was his old nature, his old self, or the flesh. We will always have to decide whether we want to walk by the Spirit or by the flesh. Living from the Spirit of God can and should be a familiar routine for us. That is God’s intention and his goal for us. It does not have to be a constant, dogged, and exhausting conflict, a constant deciding for the good. We are to accept in faith the fact that we are new selves – with a new heart, with a new life, and with a renewed spirit. We may also live in the awareness of this new existence. A butterfly was once a caterpillar, until it underwent a total change through the miracle of metamorphosis. Although it is the same insect, there is no resemblance between these two forms of existence. The butterfly flies from blossom to blossom. If it did not “be what it has become” and still felt like a caterpillar, that would be very strange. A butterfly that thinks it is a caterpillar! A funny but at the same time serious comparison, because many Christians give exactly this impression in their lives. Let us not behave like a caterpillar that stuffs itself with “earthly” things, but like

butterflies that fly and live from “heavenly blessing”! We may and should live out our new identity: I live, yet no longer I! Christ lives in me (cf. Gal 2:20).

14.18 The New and the Old Nature Are in Us at the Same Time

It is and remains a mystery to us that the old and the new nature are in us at the same time and that (to put it in biblical terms) Christ and sin dwell in us simultaneously. But Scripture teaches this fact, which our experience also confirms. What could be God’s purpose in leaving evil in us until the day of redemption? Evil is not to be lived out, but it is to be perceived, so that we, for this short time, may realize more and more what evil is really like and what it meant for Christ to be made sin.

The teaching that the Christian has only one nature (namely only the new one) must, after studying the relevant passages of Scripture, be expressly rejected. As perfect as we are in Christ, so corrupt is the flesh that we still have clinging to us. It is inseparably bound up with our bodily existence (hence also the designation “*flesh*,” where one and the same term is used both for earthly existence in the body and for the old sinful character, or the old nature, that lives in the body, the flesh). Only with physical death, or the transformation of all believers at the Rapture, has the absolute end of his sinful flesh come for the individual Christian.

14.19 Conclusion

To be born *again* and *from above* is such a tremendous event because all human wisdom, technology, and power can bring it about just as little as the change that then visibly takes place.

Heaven is stirred with joy when a sinner repents – just as is the case with a mother and a father when the child is born and they “hear” the first signs of life. The baby needs a great deal of care and nurture until it becomes independent. This applies in a similar way to the spiritual life as well. Creation is often a reflection of spiritual realities, which in turn help us to understand spiritual truths better. Children become young men who one day grow up to be fathers in Christ (1 John 2:13-14).

When we speak today of the “new nature,” what is actually meant is the “new eternal life, given by God,” which at the same time the Lord Jesus himself embodies in his person. This life necessarily has a particular kind, a particular

character, or a specific nature. This means that this life describes not only an existence (that is, being), but also bears witness to whose handwriting distinguishes it and in what way it expresses itself morally. Let me point out once more: The term “divine nature” occurs only once in the NT, where it is an indication of how God’s character and attributes unfold in us and are expressed in our lives.

With John and Peter as well as with James we have now, after beginning with Paul, climbed all the mountains. There were many fascinating views and insights that have magnified for us the greatness of God in his nature and in his salvation. The knowledge of God, of his nature and of his deeds, longs to fill our hearts.

The life of those who are born again is not only existence, not only being and waiting for heaven, but above all life from fullness. God gives gladly and abundantly, and we should not recognize this only once we are in heaven.

15. Temperament and Character

Genuine Christian life begins with a radical renewal, on the basis of which a constant change toward Christlikeness follows. What influence does temperament have on my life of faith and of overcoming?

Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, gives the following brief explanation: “Temperament describes the way in which a living being acts and reacts, that is, its behavioral style. This is deeply anchored and is made up of emotional, motor, and attention-related reactions and self-regulation. The term describes relatively constant, and therefore typical, characteristics of behavior such as perseverance, stimulus threshold, mood, and tempo.”⁹⁹

“The theory of temperaments, which is almost 2,500 years old, categorizes people according to their basic disposition and is today, scientifically speaking, an outdated theory ... It goes back to humoral pathology (the theory of the four humors), which is attributed to Hippocrates of Kos (Greek physician, 460 – 375 BC) ... The connection of the theory of the four humors with the theory of the four temperaments was made by Galen of Pergamon, who assigned a temperament to each of the four fluids of the body (‘humores’). Depending on the predominance of one of these four fluids, the temperament associated with it was said to be especially pronounced ... :

- blood (‘sanguis’): sanguine (cheerful, active)
- phlegm (‘phlegma’): phlegmatic (passive, sluggish)
- black bile (‘melas cholé’): melancholic (sad, pensive)
- yellow bile (‘cholé’): choleric (irritable and excitable).”¹⁰⁰

15.1 The Bible and the Theory of Temperaments

On the one hand, it must be stated that the theory of temperaments is of pagan origin. On the other hand, it is a fact that it is scientifically outdated. These two observations have to do with the fact that this theory neither appears in the Bible nor can be derived from it. The Bible simply ignores this theory, which

99. Available online at <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperament> (in German).

100. Available online at <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperamentenlehre> (in German).

already existed at the time when its second part (the New Testament) was written.

Nevertheless, we do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Temperaments are a reality, and that is why a look at (one's own) temperament can be useful. Even if this theory is outdated, every person has a temperament that often corresponds more or less to one of the four mentioned or to a mixture of them.

Even after my new birth I remain the person I was before, but a new spiritual life that has Christ's nature and character has been given to me. This life is to shape my personality. Even the so-called strong sides of my temperament are worthless without Christ. Only personalities filled by him correspond to God's standard for the new life: Christ is the guideline and the standard of the new creation that we have become. The nature of Christ, in turn, is expressed in the fruit of the Spirit. That is our norm for the formation of our personality. An examination of temperaments is justified as long as it is subordinate to the real goal of our Christian life.

It is beneficial to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the temperaments. We deal with them every day; they are part of our life and so they also belong to our life of faith. We know that we cannot simply change our structure (what we have inherited from our parents). To recognize how we are structured is definitely useful, since in this way negative things and those behaviors that can hinder and block our growth toward Christlikeness are also uncovered. The sluggish behavior of the phlegmatic is mostly an obstacle to an active life of faith. The same applies to the rash actions and judgments of the choleric. We should become aware of such negative aspects in order to be able to counteract them. A test can certainly be helpful for this.

An excessive preoccupation with the temperaments with regard to our spiritual life and our gifting strongly directs attention to ourselves. There are a few exhortations to examine ourselves and our work, but the motto is almost always that we should look to Christ. That brings about change, in which we of course take part.

W. J. Ouwenel: "They (Ole Hallesby, Tim LaHaye, and Henry Brandt) have worked out what life looks like for the four temperaments when the heart is turned away from God and gives itself over to sin; then the bad sides of the temperaments prevail. But when the heart is directed toward God and entrusts

itself to the leading of the Holy Spirit, then the strong sides in the personality can be developed, and Christ takes shape in the form of the warmth, the sincerity, the liveliness, the friendliness, the optimism of the sanguine; in the leadership, the decisiveness, the team spirit, the determination, the enterprising spirit of the choleric; in the loyal friendship, the creativity, the self-sacrificing readiness of the melancholic; and in the calm, the good humor, the readiness to listen, the orderliness, the thoughtfulness of the phlegmatic ...

In spite of all the studies of biotic and psychic structures and ... temperaments and personality types, the human being is not a preprogrammed robot completely at the mercy of the bad sides of his character. Here too the Bible, as well as pastoral practice, teaches us that everything depends on the orientation of the heart. It is true that a person's temperament is determined by his hereditary constitution; it is therefore almost unchangeable (although small modifications can occur in it during life, but the person has no influence on that). But one must clearly distinguish **temperament** from **character**. Character is the result of a person's behavioral traits, which, however, are determined not only by temperament but ... above all by the heart.

When a person comes to faith in Christ and is thus born again, he does not receive a new temperament (just as he does not receive a different body), but he does receive a 'new heart': a radically new disposition of the heart, an entirely new attitude, outlook, a new concept of life. Entirely different operant and motivational factors now begin to play a role in his life, as well as new knowledge and new thinking (that is, new 'cognition') and a newly directed will (the conative¹⁰¹ factor). Thus the renewed person can, within the (wide!) constitutional limits of his temperament, develop an entirely new character in which, as has been said, Christ takes shape in an entirely unique way."¹⁰²

In the believer, temperament – the inherited disposition and makeup – is sanctified and thus made useful for God. The friendliness of the sanguine, for example, is useful to God. Through the indwelling and leading of the Spirit it even becomes fruit for God. This applies to all the "good" sides of every temperament, since the dispositional or temperament-related side of being human belongs to God's first creation and thus already distinguished Adam

101. "Conative" means "driven," "striving"

102. W. J. Ouwencel, *Psychologie, Ein bibelorientiert-wissenschaftlicher Entwurf*, p. 168 (emphasis added).

before the Fall. Unfortunately, sin has also subjected temperament to impairments, and these must be consistently eliminated.

15.2 Character and How It Changes

Character is the recognizable quality of a person. We know this term more or less well. Mostly it is associated with good and desirable human qualities, namely with what society – and more recently especially the financial world – lacks. Unrestrained greed, self-love, and selfishness give us a foretaste of what is still to come. Society senses that a good and steadfast character, one that also resists temptation, could slow down, if not stop, moral decline.

But let us look into our own lives. The word *character* is derived from the stamp that gave a coin or a seal its shape. What shapes us, and what do others perceive in us? An even more important question is: Who and what are we in our character when no one sees us? “You recognize a person’s face in the light, his character in the dark,” says a proverb.

What the world needs has become reality in Jesus. His nature can become true in us. A good character is shaped by the fruit of the Holy Spirit and thus by Jesus. But it does not simply come flying along. Nor does God conjure it into our heart, bypassing our will. He gives us everything so that we can develop it under his leading and with his power and grace. We must train our character and thereby make it strong. Therein lies our responsibility. We must learn the spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as it were, like a new or second language, until, thanks to learning and practice, we speak it out of habit. Spiritual character is to become normal in our lives.

Character shows itself when it counts and when we are under pressure or in temptation. That is why Paul also says that we should make no provision for the flesh, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14). A firm character (that is, one that has been trained and persistently pursued) can resist the temptation, in extreme situations, to give up the spiritual principles that it has learned since its new birth and values as God’s way.

How do we train character? By learning and applying. One must learn in order to understand what this “spiritual character” is like. It is prescribed to me, so to speak, that I internalize it. In small steps we put these qualities into practice more and more, because we want to.

While temperament remains almost unchanged throughout life, character undergoes change, both for the better and for the worse. The basis of character is the will and its power to assert itself. We have a new heart and a renewed will. That is the start of a new life, which is to be accompanied all the way to the goal by the will to change.

As with the theory of temperaments, the word *character* is not to be found in the Bible. The closest to it is the biblical concept of virtue (Phil 4:8; 1 Pet 2:9 [the attribute of God]; 2 Pet 1:3, 5). The Bible does not follow the theory of virtue of the philosophers of its time. The points of agreement lie partly in what virtue is distinguished by and partly in the fact that it is practiced and trained. Seen biblically, virtue or character and its change toward Christlikeness have God himself and his kingdom as their goal. Not personal achievement as an end in itself, but a willpower renewed by the Holy Spirit and the putting into practice that springs from it, to the glory of God and for the benefit of others – this corresponds to the biblical picture and goal of our transformation, which will flow into the final goal of God’s new world.

“Watch your thoughts, for they become words.
 Watch your words, for they become actions.
 Watch your actions, for they become habits.
 Watch your habits, for they become your character.
 Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

16. Closing Words

There are times when things grow over our heads and we no longer know what to do and what to leave undone. Sometimes the flesh breaks out, so that we are astonished and shocked at ourselves. Sometimes we are just as shocked at our indifference. All of this will meet us and accompany us as long as we are on the way to consummation in our earthly existence. This observation is not meant to excuse anything. But we also want to remain honest when it comes to how much spiritual truth is unfolding in our lives.

Let us take courage without giving up! Even if inwardly we feel like giving up, that is the worst solution. Resignation and capitulation are of fleshly and devilish origin!

The Father helps us with every step – regardless of how small or how big it is. We are to make progress on the way to the goal. Even if we go through times when we move away from him, he is near to us, and one step is always enough to return to his arms.

Perhaps the mountain hikes were so time-consuming and strenuous that you now can no longer see the forest for the trees. Of course, if you take all the biblical texts on this subject together, it is quite an extensive matter. But we are experiencing a growth in spiritual understanding brought about by God. And that simply takes time, too. We can neither force it nor shorten it. God goes his way with us. He is for us, and we are in his care. He does not stand behind us like a slave driver who is interested only in our mistakes and our failures. On the contrary: He has adopted us as his sons and children and gives us everything we need so that we can live to his glory.

Even Paul tells us, for our comfort, that on the way to glory he has not yet reached this very goal and has not yet become perfect. But his direction is right; he presses on toward the goal, because he has been seized and gripped by it – by Christ. That is his secret.

Changing sides, and all commitment as well as all devotion, all effort, all self-denial, all determination, will be worth it. In glory we will no longer have this unique opportunity. That is why our time “in the body” (2 Cor 5:10), in our

earthly existence, is so extraordinarily valuable. It cannot be repeated, and the opportunities that arise in it will not be offered to us again.

“God has not given us a spirit of fear

(timidity, anxiety),

but (the Spirit)

of power,

and of love

and of self-discipline

(discipline, self-control, balance).”

2 Tim 1:7



Our way to the goal is not just a steady uphill climb in spiritual growth and in sanctification. There is a downhill, there are standstill and stagnation, but there is also an uphill. The direction must be right, and we are drawn by the goal itself – looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith!

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103. I have drawn on the literature listed and in part also quoted it. However, its being listed in no way means that I agree with all the statements in the books listed.

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Elb *Elberfelder Übersetzung, nicht revidiert* (Elberfelder translation, unrevised), Berlin, 1961.

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Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

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