

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE THE GOD WHO CHANGES US *Once Slaves, Now Children*

As we continue our Letters to God’s People, we move to the section on The God Who Changes Us – beginning with *Once Slaves, Now Children*. The slavery we consider today is not the type of slavery experienced in early American history nor is it the slavery found in sex trafficking today. Paul’s letter to the Romans concerns mankind’s inherited sin nature.

Since Adam, every generation and every individual has been born under the curse of sin in need of redemption. And beginning with that first generation, the Almighty Father set into motion an insurance plan for the purpose of delivering us from sin slavery. Those born before God’s plan took full effect were covered by faith as they looked forward to its implementation. Those born after God’s plan took full effect are covered by faith looking back to the plan. Jesus, known as the Second Adam and the sinless Son of God, fulfilled God’s insurance plan and paid the ransom for our sin debt with his sinless blood. **Romans 10:9 (ESV)**⁹ *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* When we accept God’s insurance plan of salvation we change our slave status to kingdom children.

On his third missionary journey, Paul found himself at a crossroads. Since he was so far west, it would have been the perfect time to go to Rome and visit the church family there. However, Paul was carrying financial contributions to the needy Jerusalem church made by the Macedonian Christians. He recognized his immediate responsibility to go to Jerusalem. Since Paul could not go two places at one time, he made the Spirit-led decision to write a letter to the Roman church. His letter became one of the most loved books of the New Testament, considered by many to be Paul’s most magnificent work.

From slaves to sons.

Read Romans 8:12-15 (ESV)¹² *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*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.*¹⁴ *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*¹⁵ *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

In the Garden Adam and Eve chose to eat from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their disobedience to God’s command brought sin along with physical and spiritual death into the world. They also lost their access to the Father and to the tree of life which was also present in the garden. **1 Corinthians 15:45 (ESV)**⁴⁵ *Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit.* Our sin debt is replaced with a Spirit-filled life. We are indebted to Him for providing access to the Father and opening the way to the tree of life once again. **Revelation 2:7 (ESV)**⁷ *He who has an ear, let*

him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Today many families go overseas to adopt children from countries that were once our enemies, i.e., Russia and China. In the first century, when Romans had no sons of their own, they would choose a boy to perpetuate their name and inherit their estate. The eyes of God are searching for sons and daughters of the earth to adopt into heaven's family. God takes His enemies, enslaved to sin and makes us His children. We are taken out of the sin-ridden slave family of Adam and placed into the eternal family of God as sons and daughters of the King and we are giving the privilege of calling Him Abba! Abba is Aramaic, a language spoken since 2,000 B.C. and the language of Jesus. It means Father – a loving term much like we use our word Daddy today.

If you have invited Jesus into your heart, you are 'in the family'! You do not need to remain a slave to fear - fear of tomorrow, fear of finances, fear of failing, fear of being left alone, the list is endless. Paul said, *you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.* My husband, John, was adopted after his mother remarried. To look at his birth certificate, there is no indication of his adoption - just his sonship in the Jardina family. When we are born into this world we are born into Adam's sin family. When we accept Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us and we are born again into the eternal kingdom of God free from sin's curse!

From groaning to glory.

Read Romans 8:18-25 (ESV) ¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* ¹⁹ *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* ²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope* ²¹ *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²² *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* ²³ *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* ²⁴ *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* ²⁵ *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Paul in his flesh undoubtedly wondered at times if all the trials he was going through were worth it. After consideration, he realized that all the sufferings (being beaten, stoned, flogged, shipwrecked, imprisoned) were nothing compared to what God had waiting for him. Paul gives us the secret of how to face our troubles – look toward to the glory that is coming.

Paul mentions three separate groanings. The first is the groaning of creation. Here in Arkansas we experience the distinct changing of the seasons. Each season of nature brings expectation. I love spring because of its presentation of new life. As children in the family of God, we look forward to the time when God makes everything new. **Revelation 21:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*... God's Word says that creation itself is groaning for that coming time when the sons of God are revealed. The lifeless physical bodies of the sons and daughters of God are currently in the earth, the sea and the

wind. Creation is awaiting the revealing of those children in new bodies since that will be sign that the curse upon will be gone..

The second groaning comes from believers! Our groaning harmonizes with nature – sighing and looking forward to the time when *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. **1 Corinthians 15:52-53***

It is hard to believe when we are young but the older we get, the clearer it becomes that our bodies are condemned to death by sin and are literally wearing out. Our hearts cry out to see the Lord, receive a new body, and live with Him and serve Him forever. ***Philippians 3:20-21 (ESV)***²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*²¹ *who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Read Romans 8:26-30 (ESV)²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*²⁷ *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*²⁹ *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*³⁰ *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

The third groaning Paul mentions is the Spirit's groaning. On this side of eternity, the Holy Spirit groans with us and feels the burdens of our weaknesses and suffering. But the Spirit does more than groan. He prays for us in His groanings so that we might be led into the will of God. We do not always know God's will. At times it is difficult to concentrate on prayer if our bodies are filled with pain or we are numb from anxiety or grief. There are times when we literally do not have a clue how we should pray. These are moments to remember that when we do not know what we ought to pray for, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. In reality those groanings are better than words because they come from the Spirit of God Himself on our behalf. We do not always know how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes so that we might live in the will of God in spite of suffering. The Spirit shares our burdens.

Romans 8:28 is on my list of favorites. I discovered it when I was still a teenager. My Mother and Grandmother made sure to point out the qualifications regarding this promise. They explained that it is not that all things work together for good as many in the secular world will quote – instead it is all things work together for good **for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose**. Richard DeHaan said that though we may not fully understand our afflictions and be unable to pray intelligently about them, we can know with absolute certainty that every trial and tear is part of an overall plan for our good. If you do not already know this verse by heart, you need to learn it so you can claim its promise for yourself!

To me, **Romans 8:29-30** is not as easily understood as **Romans 8:28**. Our first question regarding predestination might be – did God beforehand plan things out without any regard for human response? For

example, in the Old Testament, we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Does this mean that God took a nice young Egyptian Pharaoh and turned him into a heartless monster? No! God does not violate the free will He gives to humankind instead God works with it. God used what the ruthless man Pharaoh became to work out His purpose for the good of His people. Paul is referring to God's work in ordaining salvation for us without our prior knowledge. I mentioned God's insurance plan earlier. You can also look at what God did this way. Before the creation of the world, God knew that man would sin and that He would send Jesus as atonement for our sins. God, the Master Architect, had all these plans drawn up before the building project of creating earth began. The word predestine comes from a Greek word meaning to determine or decide something beforehand.

Some have a problem with predestination because they believe if some are predestined to salvation then others are predestined to eternal damnation. This is called double predestination. However, this is not in keeping with scripture. We always have the right and ability to make our own choice and when we choose Jesus there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

From death to life.

Read Romans 8:31-39 (ESV) ³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* ³³ *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The emphasis in our final passage is the security of the believer. We do not need to fear the past, present, or future because we are secure in the love of Christ. Paul presented five arguments to prove that there could be no separation between the believer and the Lord. The five arguments are this: (1) God is for us. (2) Christ died for us. (3) God has justified us. (4) Christ intercedes for us and (5) Christ loves us. Time does not permit us to go into detail. I will conclude with words from Warren Wiersbe.

“A review of this wonderful chapter shows that the Christian is completely victorious. We are free from judgment because Christ died for us and we have His righteousness. We are free from defeat because Christ lives in us by His Spirit and we share His life. We are free from discouragement because Christ is coming for us and we shall share His glory. We are free from fear because Christ intercedes for us and we cannot be separated from His love. No condemnation! No obligation! No frustration! No separation! If God be for us, who can be against us!”