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Introduction

The post-apostolic fathers, who were concerned with the order of the New Testament canon, recognized with a correct view that the epistle of Paul to the Romans deserved the most distinguished place in the entire epistolary literature of the second part of the Bible. First of all, because this letter is directly and organically connected to the conclusion of the Acts of the Apostles, which precede it. This is namely the book of transition. It begins with the report of the great deeds of the glorified Lord from heaven through his apostles, first of all, as it had to be according to the promise, exclusively on Israelite soil. And even then, when already the first messengers of the Gospel, after the persecution that arose over Stephen, went beyond the borders of the Jewish land to Samaria and proclaimed the Risen Lord as Savior to the half-pagan Samaritans, it happened quite within the framework of the priority position that Israel had occupied in the previous economy of God, the Holy Spirit was given to those only through the laying on of hands of the appointed apostles of the circumcision. Only after the High Council had officially hardened itself in the stoning of the Spirit-filled Stephen also against the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and had now become ready for the judgment of blindness, did the Lord awaken Himself to the chosen witnesses of His glory as the exalted Christ from heaven, who was to bear His name before kings and princes and His people Israel, and whom He then entrusted with the mystery of a "Body of Christ" that had remained hidden until then, which was to be formed and prepared out of all nations by the Spirit of Sonship, which the Gentiles also received in quite the same manner as the Israelite disciples of the Master on the day of Pentecost, but in complete independence from Jerusalem and without any cooperating action on the part of any of the Twelve in purely Gentile surroundings in the house of a Roman officer at Caesarea, to the utter amazement and wonder of Peter and his six believing brethren of the circumcision. In the middle of the Acts of the Apostles, the flourishing mother church in Jerusalem, which had reached the height of spiritual knowledge, disappears from the scene, after it had proven its inner maturity and maturity in the clearest way by the unanimous decision on the question of the position of the Gentile Christians in relation to the Law of Moses. And from then on Luke reports almost only about the blessed activity of Paul, the only shining star in the apostolic sky of those days, and his report ends with the entrance of the Pauline Gospel in Rome. And this is followed by the letter of this apostle to the Romans, although chronologically it does not belong to the first letters of our apostle.

Of even greater importance, however, is the theme of this tremendous, foundational letter: *The righteousness of God*. In three large main sections he treats this subject with masterly hand: Chapters 1-8 the question is settled: How does the justification of the individual man take place, whether he be Jew or Gentile, both of whom are in the same condemnation without distinction, whether by the law or without the law, so that God's righteousness is not only not violated but is glorified and crowned thereby. The three following chapters 9-11 contain the solution of one of the most difficult problems for the righteousness of God, namely the question, how does the same come to its unbroken validity with the people of divine election, to whom God owed nothing of all that he had promised to them, and after whom he had stretched out his loving hands all day long, but in vain, and whom he now had to justifiably abandon to the most terrible judgment, to hardening, because of their stubborn unbelief, in order to remain truthful, but whom he nevertheless did not finally reject. Interwoven with this are the great questions of divine foreknowledge, predestination, and election of graces, all of which are most closely related to his unimpeachable justice, holiness, and impartiality. The final chapters of the letter contain practical instructions on how the righteousness of God can and should be realized in our lives.

For the sake of the profound treatment of this tremendous subject, which touches the heavens and the earth most intimately, the Epistle to the Romans deserves the leading place in the whole delicious series of apostolic letters to the churches of Jesus Christ.

The eighth chapter of this letter describes *the heights of the personal life of salvation in the power of God's righteousness*. That is why we have called it the Song of Sonship. It truly deserves to be engraved with golden letters in the heart and mind of every true child of God. It is an inexhaustible source of the purest knowledge in the deepest things of God. It is the Magna Charta of the very highest nobility in heaven and on earth, our charter to the highest conceivable levels of the likeness of God in Christ Jesus. It is a never failing source of richest consolation in the face of all imaginable sufferings and temptations that our earthly life may bring. It is the unconquerable weapon against all the fiery darts of the evil one, the triumphant song of the fighter ordained to overcome in the good fight of faith. It is the boldest challenge to all hostile powers to dare their utmost on those who are called and ordained to be conformed to the Son of His love, the love from which nothing can separate us, neither high nor low, neither angels nor principalities nor powers, neither death nor life, neither things present nor things to come, nor any other creature. Thus concludes this glorious chapter, to the closer consideration of which the following pages shall be devoted. But may the Lord give enlightened eyes of the heart, not only to rightly divide the words of this life, but also to rightly hear, keep and move them, so that Christ may be glorified in us and His church may be prepared for the day of its meeting with Him, the Head over all, in the heavenly regions.

Verse 1-4

Verse 1-4: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law made powerless, - in that it was weakened by the flesh, - God condemned, that is, sin in the flesh, by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin's sake, that the righteousness required by the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The chapter begins with a magnificent, royal proclamation, to which the Spirit has led the apostle through the serious and moving, but also precious explanations of the two preceding chapters 6 and 7. There the clear basic lines are drawn, the firm foundation securely laid, on which the righteousness of God can put such a wonderful, uplifting and liberating proclamation into words and let it go out into the wide, wide world, without somehow offending its inviolability. It is the supreme judge of the world himself, beyond whom there is no longer any authority, nor can there be, whose throne stands in holiness and truth, whose judgment is unclouded and flawless, who here lets it be

proclaimed unequivocally that there is now no condemnation for all who are in Christ Jesus, because of the death and resurrection of Christ from the dead.

It is of utmost importance that we carefully ascertain the true wording of this divine announcement, because everything depends on it for the unclouded peace of our heart even in the face of our sinfulness and carnality. It does not say, as Luther used to print it in most earlier translations, that there is "nothing more damnable¹" in those who are in Christ Jesus. For this corresponds neither to the clear teaching of Scripture, nor to the unanimous experience of all sincere believers in Christ Jesus. We know only too well that there is still much about us, i.e. our natural constitution and nature, that could never stand before the holy and incorruptible justice of our God, if our God had not invented a way, that nevertheless there can and will never be any question of actual condemnation and rejection before his face, if we are found otherwise in Christ Jesus. In other words, this proclamation does not want to induce us to an embarrassing self-examination, to a strict self-interrogation before God, whether or what is still reprehensible in us. It is from the outset no question of my moral or religious condition, holiness or sinfulness. It is not what I am or have accomplished in pious endeavors, in rich, blessed experiences, services or achievements that is at issue here. This is a completely different chapter, which also finds its corresponding completion in the Scriptures, when for example 2. Cor. 5, 10 says that we, (believers) must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ, where each one will be received after he has worked in the body, whether good or evil. That judgment is only a question of the just reward for the faithfulness or unfaithfulness shown in service while alive, but never a question of my condemnation and rejection or my acceptance and entrance into eternal life. From the beginning, it is only those who are saved, who have already reached eternal life, who will be rewarded or also punished and sharply rebuked, yes, who under certain circumstances will see their entire life's work as believers consumed in the fire of judgment, but they themselves will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).—

Here we do not have to deal with such questions at all, this must be clearly understood and stated, otherwise we get into uncertainty and thus into dangerous restlessness, which is certainly not compatible with the divine intention. Indeed, no condemnation, that is the wonderful work of our God in Christ Jesus, no matter what my previous, sad past, my still so shameful, criminal and vicious way of life, my still so deep sinking may have been, no matter how much of my terrible past may still cling to me in inner bondages and wrongdoings, how much my old man still gives me a hard time day by day. We will have to talk about this more often in the further course of this chapter.

But now, what is the only prerequisite in this liberating, divine explanation? What alone does it depend on? What is expected of me, demanded of me? What is imposed on me? To all these questions there is only one answer: Nothing at all is demanded, nothing at all is expected as achievement or only effort. God is finished with the law of commandments in demands: Thou shalt!... is finally finished. The law has done all its duty in the divine procedure with the sinful mankind, it has brought about their complete inability, their complete bankruptcy in relation to the demands of the divine holiness and justice. The most law-abiding and punctiliously, even scrupulously pious people have been proved by the law to be the bitterest enemies of God, since they have condemned the Lord of glory, the Prince of life, the holy and righteous according to the law and by the law to the most ignominious, curse-worthy death. Never again will there be an attempt on God's part to recommend to mankind the way of obedience to the law as the way of life. The chapter is closed for all eternity. If only people would believe this of their God.

No, and a thousand times no, nothing is demanded here but only one thing, that all and every effort and endeavor to want to accomplish and finish something even before God is condemned as a robbery of the honor of Him who hung on the cursed wood and by His death took all our shame and

¹ Note May –2000: according to the basic text better: verdict of condemnation.

disgrace upon Himself, carried away our sins once and for all, redeemed all guilt and bought and acquired us completely alone for Himself and God. To *be invented in Him*, that is all that is presupposed here. But what does that mean? And how does one do that? How can a lost, sinful man on this poor earth, surrounded not only with weakness, but corrupted in his whole nature and sold under sin from the beginning, how can he attain a position in Christ Jesus? Isn't God a hard man who expects and presupposes the unaffordable? Indeed, if God wanted to demand of us to go up to heaven where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God in majesty, then one might ask and accuse the Most High of demanding the impossible. But this is not so. But how does the Scripture speak? It declares in clear, concise words, not only that Christ died for our sins and was raised for our righteousness, but it goes much, much further and tells us that we were *crucified with Christ*, planted with him to the same death, so that we might also be like him in resurrection (Rom 6:5). And again the same apostle says: "We who were dead in sins God has made alive together with Christ, raised up together with him and transferred together with him to the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:5, 6). Referring to this he testifies to the Philippians: Our citizenship is in the heavens, from where we also expect the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, who will transform the body of our nothingness and conform it to His body of glory (Phil. 3, 20, 21).

These are things of God, effects of the spirit, of which the spiritual, even if so pious or even theologically educated man hears nothing, they are foolishness to him, because they can be heard only in the spirit and through the spirit. But we who believe have not received the spirit of the learned world or of the pious flesh, but the spirit from God, that we may know what is given us of God in Christ. And this is what the holy apostles of Christ spoke to us, not in words that human wisdom can teach or understand, but which the Holy Spirit alone teaches, and we discern and grasp spiritually (1 Cor. 2:12–14).

So here too, as everywhere in matters of the true Gospel of God, we are not confronted with high, unattainable demands addressed to our pious aspirations, but with accomplished deeds of God, all of which became historical reality more than eighteen centuries ago, and to which nothing more is to be added on our part in order to make them legally valid and effective for salvation. It is very repugnant to my natural thinking and feeling that God should really have provided and accomplished everything all by Himself, also this incomprehensible mystery in Christ and His life in us, –because this is based on complete reciprocity–, it bends my pride, my pious self-confidence deep into the dust, I do not come at all to my own account. But that is exactly what God wants, that no flesh should boast before Him. He alone wants and must have all the honor, the unabridged glory. And, if I think about it correctly, it is also best that way alone. For if any cooperation on my part, however modest, were required or essential for the realization of this wonderful relationship: Christ in us, we in him, then the whole thing would be in question again and there would never be any question of absolute peace and security. One would never get out of the anxious questioning: Have I done everything possible, have I lacked nothing at all? God has effectively and forever prevented this, and for this He deserves eternal thanks and adoration.

But this matter is of such great importance that we do well to illustrate it properly, as far as this is possible from the Scriptures. For our natural conception there is only one condition in the human existence, which has a certain relationship with it, the organic, but completely unconscious life of an embryo in the womb. But as vivid as this is on the one hand, as far as the complete dependence of the still unborn child on the life and well-being of the mother is concerned, as imperfect is the example on the other hand, as far as our conscious life of faith in Christ, our glorified Lord and Head in heaven, which sustains us daily and hourly, enlivens us, sanctifies us and transforms us into His image, is concerned.

We therefore ask ourselves this question for our benefit and piety: How did the man Christ Jesus, the Son of the Virgin, the Word of God who became flesh and appeared in the form of a servant, get to where he is now, at the right hand of God, high above all the heavens? What path did he have to take and follow to the end to get there? To this the Scripture gives us a clear and definite answer: Only through Gethsemane and over Golgotha. For thus it is written: Because he emptied himself, took the form of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, for this reason God exalted him and gave him the name above all names (Phil. 2, 7– 9). Thus the way is shown to us, which does not only lead to the cross or under the cross, as one likes to sing in pious songs, but it leads inexorably to the cursed wood. There, in Him, our justice has been done, there we have been condemned, judged, and put to death once and for all. This is the powerful argument of our apostle in the sixth chapter of this letter: We know that our old man was crucified with us, that the body of sin might be put away, so that we no longer serve sin, for he who has died to sin is justified by it (Rom. 6:6, 7). The one who only recognizes and testifies that Christ died for **us, in our place**, stops halfway. In the obedience of faith we have to take it seriously that we died **with Christ to** sin, that in Him the world was crucified to us and we to the world (Gal. 6, 14). Half measures are not enough. Dying is about the whole. And the subsequent resurrection as well, hal-lelujah!

In order to protect ourselves from any possible deception, we want to remember in these days of general Christianity, in which so many dangerous false coins are being used, also with biblical terms and expressions, that already in the days of his flesh Jesus had a very important following, a large crowd of followers and declared disciples. Among them were thousands who not only knew him personally well enough to be able to speak and tell about him in an understandable and beneficial way, but they had also experienced things from him and learned them personally. They had heard from his lips blissful and powerful speeches by which they were deeply moved. They had been fed and satisfied by him in a most wonderful way with little loaves and fishes. They had seen powers of life, of sanctification, of comfort emanating from him and had experienced them themselves in their own bodies. Do not say that all those tens of thousands had nothing from Jesus. But we need only ask the simple question: Were all those uncounted crowds who flocked to him and followed him, who filled whole regions with his fame, were they all –**people in Christ?** – No one would dare to claim that. He would never be able to prove it. And now we only have to give an honest account of the fact that even today in professing Christianity there are thousands of people of whom exactly the same can be said as of those to whom personal touches for comfort, for sanctification, for inner refreshment and strengthening in suffering, to whom delicious answers to prayer are nothing alien, but –people in Christ? No, they are certainly not, nor would they even dare to pretend to be such. The situation is clearly in front of us, with which we have to deal inwardly, in order not to be deceived in the end.

In the following words the apostle gives us the reason for the delicious facts that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He speaks the language of those who know the law as he also knows such among his readers (chap. 7, 1). First of all he speaks of two kinds of law, which are in a wonderful contrast to each other. On the one hand, the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, redeeming, liberating, blessing, transforming to God-likeness. On the other hand, the law of sin and death in our members, the shameful, humiliating, killing power of which we are all painfully enough aware of, if we have otherwise become new creatures and put away the old man. For it is only in its contrast that the realization of our natural bondage to this terrible law, against which we are completely powerless, grows in our consciousness.

That Paul may speak of a law of the spirit of life is for us a source of indescribable consolation, an unshakable ground for our joyful confidence. It is the firm guarantee that these teachings of our living Lord are not mere pious moods, feelings or suggestions, which are fleeting and impermanent.

It is the firmest and most reliable thing in the whole sphere of divine omnipotence, *the law, as a result of which God had to raise His child Jesus from the dead*, if otherwise His own eternal counsel of love was not to fail and come to naught; if He, the living One, was not to take up arms before him who had the power of death, the devil. For if Christ is not raised, then all preaching is vain and empty. Then also our faith is in vain, then we are still in our sins, then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost, then we, who count on the Risen Lord, are the most lamentable of all men (1 Cor. 15:17 –19). As certainly as Christ had to die for the sake of our sins, it was impossible for Him to be kept from death (Acts 2:23, 24).

With this, God has created a completely new legal ground for all manifestations of his grace, love and mercy to all those who died with Christ and were raised together with him. He can and may no more withdraw himself from them than he could leave him in death who had trusted in him even unto death. About such a law, to which we know our great and glorious God to be bound, we may only rejoice and worship. To whom the delicious mystery of this law of life has dawned, he no longer groans and laments under the shameful yoke, neither of his own lusts, urges or desires, that is the law of sin and death in his members, nor under the law of commandments in statutes, and unattainable demands, which can only condemn, but never liberate and save.

People talk and write a lot about the majesty of the law. Also of the unbreakability and reliability of the so-called laws of nature, from which one has built even the almighty God insurmountable barriers for his doing. There can be no miracles because of these laws of nature. There is something prophetic, a certain dark foreboding of the truth in this human talk. If one only wanted to understand it rightly, how one would speak grandly and gloriously of the God for whose saving power there is, however, a law of the spirit and life, which he never intends to evade, but which is and remains in effect with absolute infallibility until the end of eternities. For it is the law of his own imperishable being. For the Son declares of the Father: *God is spirit* (Joh. 4, 24; 2. Cor. 3, 17). And of the second (and last) Adam the Scripture testifies that he became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15, 45). A deeper and firmer anchoring of what Paul here cites as the ground for the proclamation of our damnationlessness ²in Christ Jesus cannot be found at all. God's being and life are irrevocably anchored for the successful accomplishment of the work of salvation, which is founded and rooted by faith in faith among those who are truly in Christ Jesus and can say with Paul: *But I live, yet now not I, but Christ lives in me* (Gal. 2:20).

What the apostle now emphasizes is the fact that that very law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has the indescribably precious effect of freeing us as believers from the slavish power and tyranny of the law of sin and death working in our members, and of obtaining for us the glory of the freedom of true sons of God. No earthly power, no religion, no moral teaching, no resolutions, resolutions or vows, however resolute, are capable of making any man truly and permanently free from the law of radical evil in our natural being. What is born of the flesh is flesh and never changes into spirit (John 3:6). My own nature remains my own, even though I am and remain in Christ Jesus. It is and remains present at all times and tries in every conceivable way to assert itself again and again and if possible to gain the upper hand, or at least to bring about a compromise with the new nature of the spirit, that certain activities should not be completely denied to it. But this is not the divine way, which rather already in Rom. 6, 6 clearly and succinctly declared that our old man was crucified with Christ, i.e. completely abolished, completely lost all and every legal power and every claim to consideration.

On the other hand, things are not as one would like them to be or as one believes oneself entitled to have or to claim, namely that every trace of one's own being has completely disappeared from my personality. And that I could reach a personal state of sanctification in which even temptation is

² April– 2000 note: ... that there is no longer any condemnation sentence for someone who is in Christ Jesus!

hardly to be spoken of. That our God could have really cleaned up our being in such a radical way that every last inclination, every last inclination to ungodliness, to self-love, to the finest selfishness would have disappeared without a trace, suffers no doubt. It is also obvious that our God would have made the work on his children much easier if he had completely taken away all and every possibility and inclination to sin with their sanctification in Christ. It is very understandable how, in the best opinion of presenting the work of God great and glorious, one could go so far as to imagine oneself raised up to actual sinlessness. But it requires only a little sober reflection to realize that the work of God's saving and preserving grace truly loses nothing in magnificence and glory if we give the law of the spirit of life in us the unconditional confidence that it has under all, even conceivably the greatest difficulties of my inner life, i.e. that is, with the ever-present tendency to go astray and to deviate from God, to give room to the flesh again, to become lukewarm and sluggish in the pursuit of the heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus, it will nevertheless be able to cope with all the evil urges and carnal inclinations completely to complete the work it has begun, if we walk differently in faith and not in the feeling or in the consciousness of attained holiness.

Now, what does this liberation from the law of sin and death in my limbs consist of?

The answer to this important question is greatly facilitated for us by the fact that in the same context freedom is pronounced not only from the law of sin, but also from that of death. The latter is expressed in the well-known words of the Letter to the Hebrews: *It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.* Or that other word of our apostle: *Death is the wages of sin* (Rom. 6, 23). No one in Christendom seriously thinks that there are any exceptions to this inexorable law. Rather, one is so firmly imbued with the idea that all people must die that it is difficult to make room for the other Scripture, which reveals the mystery in clear words: We shall not all sleep (1 Cor. 15:51). It is considered strange and not quite sober to reckon with the possibility of being allowed to experience this. But if the words of the apostle before us have any practical value, then they certainly cannot mean less than that for the true sons of God in Christ there is just as little an unbending, inevitable necessity of dying as there is of sinning. But according to the Scriptures, which are confirmed by the experience of the most mature Christians, we remain both mortal and sinful children of men, to whom both possibilities, of dying and of sinning, are present at all times. Now there is not the slightest doubt that our great Savior God could have removed from all truly born again and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise not only every deeply rooted inclination or impulse ever to sin again, to become slothful or tardy, just as thoroughly down to the last and finest traces from their being, as he could have made us immediately, since we became conscious children of God and heirs of eternal life, also physically immortal. If we speak of this once "after the manner of men," as Paul often expresses it, it stands to reason that this would indeed have meant no small relief for our great Savior and Preserver to keep us holy and blameless under all circumstances. And for the saints themselves it would be no less immensely easier to remain unsullied in the evil and alienated world around us, if neither stimulus nor threat, neither temptation nor temptation would find in us any resonance, any echo, however faint, that could or would respond to it.

In exactly the same way, it would be a most desirable and pleasing thing if all true children of God could now never become either sick or infirm or tired and weary in the service of the so glorious Lord. What could be done for him and his cause, and what a tremendous impression it would make if we believers could not be dealt with by fire and sword, nor with any other kind of bodily harm.

It is so easy to understand that God's children who are determined to pursue sanctification with all seriousness long for a permanent state of irreproachable holiness, which can no longer be marred by any kind of backsliding, for the deepest reason. It is no less easy to understand that these same children of God quite sincerely have the honor and glory of our glorious Lord in heaven in mind when they ascribe to Him not only the ability but also the declared intention to bring all His children up to such a desired high state of proven, unclouded holiness, in word and deed. So that the

sorrowful sinning would be completely and fundamentally eliminated with them. So that they would not only no longer have to sin, but would also feel no attraction or urge or inclination to do so, i.e. could lead a life without sin.

However, on calm, sober reflection, every understanding child of God will have to say that the condescension of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace and glory, becomes indescribably more adorable when we realize that He does not disdain to dwell in Christ as His temple mortal bodies of redeemed men, constantly exposed to infirmity and decay, as well as to folly and sloth, He does not disdain to inhabit as His temples the mortal bodies of redeemed people in Christ, constantly exposed to infirmity and decay, as well as to folly and sloth, and to keep those who are thus endangered, tempted and sinful in His discipline at all times by His personal presence, without any help from the law, but only by the abundant grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ. For, as we have already repeatedly mentioned, He Himself, the Lord, has become the life-giving Spirit in us who believe. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is this indescribable delicious freedom from the law of sin and death in our members, the constant presence of which we are painfully and clearly aware of in just the same measure as we walk in the light and have fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:10, 11; 2 Cor. 3:17).

Furthermore, the apostle now openly deals with the holy, just and good law, which consisted of commandments and in whose educational preschool Jehovah had taken his chosen people Israel. Thereby he pronounces him without any hesitation in a clear way from the beginning the verdict: *powerless*. This means that every attempt to become free and free from the law of sin and death through the law must fail. Not because the law in itself would have been ineffectual or harmful, but because of the complete inability of our carnal nature to ever satisfy it and its demands. What it means when a believer tries to use Moses as well as Christ to effect his salvation is shown in a poignant way in the seventh chapter of our letter. We can refrain from going into more detail here. We would only like to emphasize once again that one of the most frequent causes of an unfree, subjugated Christian life, which then also tends to the subjugation of others, is the unholy delusion that one does God and man a special service if one uses the law extensively in practical life, partly in order to awaken and cultivate a deep and thorough knowledge of sin, partly in order to gain a strong support and a firm hold on the law in the face of every temptation to sin and transgression. On the other hand, Golgotha means a much deeper and more effective knowledge of the sinfulness of sin than Sinai could and should ever mean, and Moses knows nothing of the glory of the freedom of the sons of God, and still less can bring it about. Hagar can only give birth to bondage. Thus neither Moses nor Hagar are rejected as such, but they are fundamentally denied any right to become helpers of our freedom alongside Christ. To make use of them means to deny Christ and leave grace according to Gal. 5:1–5. Whoever still wants to make use of pious actions, as prescribed by the law, for the purpose of eliminating and effecting his salvation, commits a robbery of the honor of our glorious Lord, the "life-giving spirit" within us. It is vain folly if we want to handle again with regulations, statutes, vows and all kinds of pious works, to which we have died just as effectively as we were crucified with Christ to the law of sin. Unfortunately, churches and communities are full of "Ishmaels," i.e., Hagar's sons, who can never be brought to the freedom of sons because they live under the delusion that they cannot cope without law. (More about this in my book: *Free from the Law, Interpretation of the Epistle to the Galatians*).

In view of this decisive rejection of the law in statutes in the matter of our filiation, the apostle now emphasizes with increased emphasis that the actual glorious gospel is accordingly not a human religion of the highest kind, but a simple but effective *act of God*. To whom this great and yet so simple mystery has once dawned, he can exult; to him it falls like scales from his eyes; he is ashamed, like a schoolboy who has not learned his tasks, that he has ever so foolishly stood in the way of his great Savior God and himself in the light. If the gospel of our sonship is *God's deed*, then it is the sum of

human presumption to want to help Him in it, or even to contribute the least in the way of even good intentions or sincere resolutions. When sin in the flesh has been finally condemned in and with the accursed one on Golgotha, then neither mortification nor other pious exercises of any kind are needed to make the judgment of God, executed there, only legally valid and effective. The work is accomplished in every respect. It remains so and must remain so. And there is nothing left for me but to bow down in deep humility and gratitude to this accomplished deed of God and to let God alone be right, without caring in the least what may become of my previous religion or piety. If the one-time sacrifice of Christ, when he bore in his body all my sin and shame on the cursed wood, is enough for my God, then it is enough for me. Why should I then still reckon with my old man, who has long since been judged and dismissed, as if I first had to get him down and beat him to death anew every day. He has been killed once and for all in a way that is quite satisfactory for God; all his legal claims for obedience on my part are settled and I only have to reckon with the resurrected and eternal living one, and *the* calculation will be right every time and never result in a shortfall. It is all so exceedingly simple because it is divine, divinely thought and divinely executed. There is no room left at all for own glory.

All this, however, is not different from the fact that the requirements originally laid down clearly and precisely in the law of God are completely fulfilled. This glorious freedom from the law of sin and death therefore never means a lack of discipline or a letting oneself –go– according to the flesh, but the grace that brings salvation to all people takes us into discipline to deny our (own) ungodly nature and worldly lusts, so that we live prudently, righteously and godly in this world and only wait for the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Not as pious enthusiasts, dreamers and talkers, but as redeemed from all unrighteousness and as liberated and serfs of God alone (Tit. 2, 12).

In this way, and never otherwise, the impeccable holiness and righteousness of God comes fully into its own, so that its inviolable demands, to love God above all things, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, may be fulfilled completely –*in us, but* –not *by us, as our own pious achievement*, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (verse 4!).

What the last expression has to say just here is also not difficult to determine. From the whole context, the most obvious meaning is that it should mean: Who no longer deal in works of the law, but stand alone under the discipline of saving grace. In the following verses we will have ample opportunity to point out the Pauline way of speaking of the flesh, especially of the godly flesh.

Verse 5 - 9

Verse 5 9–: "For those who are of the flesh are mindful of what is of the flesh, but those who are of the Spirit are mindful of what is of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be. But those who are in the flesh are not able to please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if otherwise God's Spirit dwells in you. But he that hath not Christ's Spirit is not his."

The best and most reliable key to the correct understanding of what our apostle wants to understand by "flesh" is given by the word of the Lord Jesus to the law-abiding Nicodemus, John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Paul carries out this fundamental contrast everywhere in our context with great clarity, sharpness and determination. A strict distinction is made between that which is born from below and that which is born and comes from above. In doing so, we do well to keep in mind at all times that on the ground of this whole old creation, to which we still belong according to the flesh even as born-again, to which we are and remain even very close and intimate relatives, which has its deep meaning, both for the material

creation, as well as for us redeemed and called sons of God. This will still clearly confront us in the consideration of verse 19, ff. of our chapter. There is, in fact, a rich gradation and diversity in the manifestations of the "flesh", which must never lead us to weaken or even wipe out the fundamental contrast between flesh and spirit. The lower creation surrounding us provides us with a wealth of apt illustrations of this. As Paul says in another context 1. Cor. 15, 39: *Not all flesh is of the same kind, but men have another, cattle another, fish another, birds another.* Thus we know among men quite raw, filthy, disgusting dog –and pig flesh, rolling in the deepest excrement of uncleanness and meanness. We know dazzling, tempting, enchanting snake –and reptile meat, which still knows how to find its way into the most beautiful, almost paradisiacal earthly conditions. But we also know fine, noble-blooded, well-bred, generous and generous heroes and –giant flesh, which knows how to make its way in the world with the broadest track, which knows how to impress, and under certain circumstances can also relentlessly trample down what dares to stand in its way. There is also no lack of the most tender, amiable, educated, artistically and aesthetically with poetic wings and high moral aspirations connected doves –and eagles. Not to mention a large assortment of decidedly religiously directed "pious" flesh that fills our monasteries and other pious institutions and establishments partly with and partly without pious uniforms, that mounts the pulpit and the pious oratorical stage, studies theology and is officially patent and ordained by rites in order to "preserve religion for the people," and what the fine sayings are. But for all its high momentum and buoyancy, it is and remains –flesh that never reaches the heavenly sun, however close it may strive to come to it. It must always descend again to the earth, for it comes from below and has its nest and its being here below.

Which of these various forms of the flesh is the most seductive and dangerous is not an open question to an enlightened man of God. The Master already declared that the publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom of God rather than the highly respected representatives of the most pious flesh that the earth has ever borne and bears.

So we also understand when Paul continues to teach that those who are after the flesh are also carnally judged or minded. They are so according to the inescapable law of their own nature, from which a man can never get away until he comes under the rule of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. A pardel sooner loses his spots, a Moor the blackness of his skin, than one born of the flesh loses the carnal, i.e. set upon himself, mind and direction. The offshoots of this attitude may be the most humanly noble and commendable in themselves, or the most morally reprehensible. With men this may mean a great deal, but with God not the least. That is why the Scripture simply but honestly calls all such good works that come from the mind of the flesh, i.e. in which my own kind, my un-renewed mind seeks itself and wants to assert itself before God, "dead works" (Heb. 9:14). Thus it can happen and happens enough that the same sacrifices, gifts and offerings, for noble, divine purposes, in one case are downright abominable to God, in the other, where they spring from the Spirit, a sweet savor to Him, a pleasant sacrifice.

The apostle further explains this with the words that the attitude of the flesh means death, and only the attitude that is begotten and worked in us by the Spirit of God means life and peace. The true value of all our actions is never determined by the performance itself, but exclusively by the prevailing attitude of the heart. Whether these are specifically religious, i.e. directed to God and His work, or generally human and earthly, whether they are significant or insignificant, costly or quite simple.

That a very low, criminal, and vicious attitude and way of life brings forth and means death, most people find quite all right. But that also so-called good works and a direction of life, which is completely directed to the promotion of the good, true and beautiful or noble, should fall under the same sentence of death, against it one raises indignant protest, that is unjust and hard. But why then? Do we humans judge differently when we encounter cases where it becomes very clear to us

that people have shown us good out of purely selfish motives, have showered us with good deeds and thereby sought only themselves? Why should God, the heart annihilator, apply a different standard?

Here life and peace, there death. There are not more violent, more mutually exclusive opposites. There is no half-measure or mixture. Either my own being, unbroken and unrenewed, although educated, religious, noble, kind and pious, but always only "I", to whom I have never pronounced the judgment of negation and fundamental denial, is the core and content of my attitude, or I know myself captured and conquered by the selfless, devoted love of the spirit, which never seeks its own, but only that which is Christ Jesus. There cannot and must not be an in-between. That would be soul-martyrdom and brokenness. You cannot serve two masters. Either —or, so it must read and apply.

This is how the apostle understands the situation when he continues: The mind of the flesh is enmity against God. With how shattering clarity this became apparent in the bitter, irreconcilable enmity, not of the so-called lowest strata and classes of the Jewish people in the days of the Messiah in the form of a servant, but of the very leaders and teachers of the people of Israel who were so highly regarded because of their exemplary piety and religious austerity! Neither Herod, the finely educated bearer of Greek intellectual culture, nor Pontius Pilate, the representative of the most formidable legal—and military state that the world has produced, were animated by such deadly hatred for the Nazarene as were the pious chief priests and scribes of those days. Those might consider him a fantasist, a fool and a dreamer, as their kind still do today.

However, with sure instinct the pious leaders of his people grasped the situation: If this man remains alive, then it is over with our leadership, with our unrestricted rule over the spirits of the people forever. Therefore: Crucify, crucify him! Where Jesus lives, no religious system, even if it is built on revelation ground, can exist. Therefore, death to him and ruin! This man is not from God, because he does not keep our statutes, which we are called to guard strictly. And so the most touching thing that history knows happened, that the defenders and ordained servants of religion pushed out the Word of Life that appeared in the flesh, which was with God from the beginning, and delivered him to death. Enmity against God. With what accuracy the Scriptures always speak. Its judgment is just. Blessed is he who unconditionally submits to it and allows himself to be taught and restored by it.

The proof of fact is given in the greatest measure that this attitude of the most pious flesh is enmity against God and is not able to be subject to the law of God. The pious flesh has never and nowhere declared and registered its own bankruptcy more clearly than on Golgotha, where it let the prince of life be put to death according to the law and by the law, but before that it asked that the murderer be given to it! It has got it then also up to the today's day, since the murderer from the beginning, the whole pious, culture-proud and education-drunk world of nations with most insane delusion scourges and bloodily whips. And 18 centuries of proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, not only gradually tolerated by the world, but even patronized and legally supported by its great ones, have not been able to prevent until today that the great Christianized masses of the peoples take exactly the same path and follow it with great, religious perseverance, so that they do exactly the same as the blinded Israel on these lines. They strive to establish their own righteousness and are thus not subject to the righteousness of God. But God is infallibly and always right in all his words.

We do not need to say anything about the following saying of the apostle, that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. It is not the noblest culture, not the sum of all the highest achievements of human spirit, diligence and striving to subdue the world and creation, in which God could be pleased. All such boasting, of which the leaves of the forest of the press echo, is vain and an abomination to God. Thank God, today there are a little more people who begin to doubt the "divinity" of

these world gods, of the –catchwords and slogans with which souls have been captured and brought into deepest bondage. But nowhere do people seriously think of doing away with these "foreign gods" and of turning back to the only true and living God alone, fully and completely, and of bowing to him and obeying him.

But you, the apostle now carries out the dichotomy that applies here, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. This is true of all who are in Christ Jesus, of all who, according to *Romans 6*, hold that our old man was crucified, put to death, executed in and with Christ, that we have died to sin and live unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord, who brings the law of His own Spirit of life to full and ever fuller fruition in us. In doing so, we remain sinful, fallible creatures, exposed to temptation, error, ignorance, spiritual sloth and drowsiness, in whose own being, no matter how well educated, no matter how steeped in Christianity, nothing good dwells, who, separated from Him, can do nothing, nothing at all, that could please God. But with Paul they can say: "I live, but now **not I**, but Christ lives in me (Gal. 2, 20). Therefore they are in the Spirit, for these are the light –and power effects of the Holy Spirit given to us as believers, that we recognize and acknowledge our own nothingness, our own complete bankruptcy and death in sins, and never believe that we ourselves could be or accomplish anything on which God's good pleasure rests. In this respect, with them the old has passed away and everything has become new. Life has gained a new content, a completely new filling and meaning. It is no longer my life, but His resurrection life that I still live in the flesh, i.e. in my natural, mortal, decrepit corporeality, but which has now become the temple of the Holy Spirit, and whose members have become Christ's members. (1 Cor. 3:16; –6:15)

This is here the quite self-evident presupposition of the apostle in the words: *If otherwise God's Spirit dwells in you*. He knows and names no other children of God than those in whom the Spirit of God has taken up residence and made them a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Therein also lies the secret of the supreme consecration of all the everyday business of the body, however natural and simple, such as eating or drinking or the most ordinary work and activities of its organs, according to God's will. Therefore, for the true sons of God on earth, the artificially– pious distinction between sacred and profane actions or works and occupations no longer exists. Just as little as a fundamental difference between holy or ordinary days and times. For all my days and all my hours, whether waking or sleeping, are of my high, divine Lord and Sovereign, and are at his sole and full disposal. So also shining shoes and mucking out stalls are just as "holy" as leading meetings and preaching sermons. For all our things happen not to us nor to men, but to the glorious Lord alone. This is one of the most delicious pieces of the glory of the freedom of the sons of God. This means a world– and outlook on life that lifts us high above all miseries and pettinesses and allows us to breathe heavenly high air constantly and to abide in the constant presence of the living Lord, to know his eye and his good pleasure rest on us. That is life. Adorable and incomprehensible is the long-suffering and patience of the Holy Spirit in the face of the disdainful relegation, the practical denial and denial of His personal presence, which is offered to Him by the children of God themselves. However, this is done in ignorance, which is by no means to be excused, though it can be explained well enough from the puny and quite inadequate instruction that is usually offered to us in this field. There one sings quite devoutly, especially once a year, when the feast of Pentecost comes again, the pious chorale: O Holy Spirit enter with us and let us be your dwelling place! And this is not sung by pre-Pentecostal Israelite disciples before the Holy Spirit appeared, but by Christian congregations and circles who know from the Scriptures that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit on earth, that there is no other explanation and justification for their existence than the great, precious fact that they *are* a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, and that they do not have to ask to become so. No wonder that with such an unbelieving attitude towards the actually existing Spirit of God, the effects and manifestations of this very Spirit of power and glory do not come close to the biblical, justified measure. How unspeakable the faithfulness and perseverance of the Holy Spirit, that in

spite of such continued, hypocritical denial of His presence, He does not indignantly leave His dwelling and withdraw altogether! But how he is grieved and subdued by this is hardly to be imagined.

With the word: *But whoever does not have Christ's spirit is not his*, the apostle finishes the whole presentation. For him, only *those are* true Christians who are in the conscious possession of the Holy Spirit. This is actually already in the beautiful name "Christ". Because Christ is only the German shortened form of the word Christ, i.e. the anointed one. Therefore, this extremely correct designation is based on the correct realization that only those are Christians in truth who are anointed with the Holy Spirit, just like HE, the Anointed of God. How carelessly and superficially this name, so rich in content and meaning, is used today is beyond description. What is not called and is called "Christian" without hesitation! The essence of being a Christian (we deliberately avoid the common and unfortunately also meaningless term Christianity) does not consist in the acceptance and confession of certain doctrines and formulas, nor in the observance and fulfillment of certain Christian precepts, ordinances and statutes, all things which can indeed claim a certain space within the framework of the historically developing Christian life, but which never constitute the essence, the actual reason and core of the new life of God. Also, personal experiences and experiences actually made in the encounter and contact with the living Savior and Lord are not enough to entitle one to this name. This is vividly illustrated by the evangelical account of the countless hundreds and thousands in the days of the Son of Man on earth who had indescribably delightful contact with him, gladly listened to his delightful words, allowed themselves to be healed, fed, comforted and lifted up by him, in short, who knew and respected the true Anointed of God, believed in him, followed him and could tell great things about him, but who were therefore still far from being "men in Christ". We know very well that at that time there was no such possibility to be in Christ. However, we are not yet dealing with this question and do not blame those for something that was still out of their reach. But today things are different. But even though things are different, Christianity, the believing circles and communities are full of people who have nothing more to show and testify than that they have had personal experiences, glorious answers to prayer, refreshments, consolations, solutions and deliverances through their encounter with the living Lord, of which they speak gladly enough. But it must be emphasized that this does not yet say the same thing that lies in the mighty word of the apostle: *Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ is not his!*

If, however, this apostolic word is the only valid standard for what it means to be a Christian, which cannot be doubted, then it is appropriate, in view of such words and promises as *1 Cor. 15:23*: "After these who belong to Christ when he comes again, to ask ourselves very seriously whether we are also entitled to count ourselves among those who belong to him. Otherwise, a terrible disappointment awaits us.

Verse 10, 11

Verse 10, 11: But if Christ is in you, the body is 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, the same One who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit dwelling in you."

We note first the various phrases and expressions of which the apostle makes use in this connection to illustrate and establish the essential and characteristic of the new divine life in believers. To be after the Spirit, to have the mind of the Spirit, to be in the Spirit (verse 5 –7), coincides entirely with what he says (verse 8) of the dwelling of the Spirit of God in us and of the possession of the Spirit of Christ. He wants to have understood exactly the same when he now speaks of the Christ in us (verse 10), or again (verse 11) of the Spirit of God, the Father of glory, who raised Jesus from the dead, dwelling in us. In sevenfold turn and illumination stands before our adoring minds the uplifting fact

that the congregation of believers of this age is the only true temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit legitimized by Him alone. Not heavenly aspiring cathedrals and cathedrals, not splendidly adorned magnificent buildings of marble and precious metal, has the exalted Lord, who is Himself the life-giving Spirit, chosen for His abiding abode, the actual place of His hidden life—and revelation of glory, but the mortal, frail bodies of sinful but redeemed children of men. They have such treasure in earthen vessels, so that the exuberant power is never their own, but only God's (2 Cor. 4:7). Our bodies temples of the most high God. Our members members of Christ. All, even the ordinary, everyday functions of our bodies, such as eating and drinking —holy actions. The most humble activity, performed in the spirit of Christ, —a true service of God. The humblest, most inconspicuous position in life, even if it were slave labor or serfdom, ennobled and adorned with priestly adornment: Holy to the Lord! What in the former household of God under the law was indignation and rebellion, presumption and robbery of the sanctuary (Deuteronomy 16:3, ff), is for the whole congregation of the saints today the normal and God-ordained. All the oppressive and troublesome, conscience-binding and subjugating notions and ordinances, distinctions and gradations between "clergy" (oh, that they all were) and laity, between sacred and profane acts, days, times and services are born of apostasy from the simplicity and purity of the delicious gospel of the one, holy church of believers, the fullness of Christ, the sole temple of the Spirit of grace and glory. How deeply we have sunk back into bondage. How basely have we been tricked out of our ancestral filial rights in the house of God. One has only to search through the last years of leading community papers on the "burning" question of the Lord's Supper to get a picture of the sad bondage in which the most earnest and sanctified children of God are entangled. And where does one dare to manfully cut this Gordian knot with the sword of the Spirit and declare to the congregation of believers: Why do you not break bread and share the blessed cup back and forth in the houses, even where only two or three would be together in His name? Has it been different from the beginning? And the solution would be so simple. But then the storm would break out from all sides. The guardians of the ecclesiastical (national —or free church without distinction) "order" (?), the jealous watchmen over the inviolability of the "spiritual office", they would blow the noise trombone through the country and prophesy, now everything would go out of joint. And so they continue to —"officiate" and —"order", and the hungry pine away on the road, and the glory of the freedom of the sons of God remains for thousands a beautiful dream, which will perhaps be fulfilled in the "hereafter", —if there are not also "ordered guardians of order".

Or think of the namelessly sad extent that the devastating enslavement of "Sabbatism" has taken on, an infestation that could never have torn so deeply if one had remained in the simplicity and firmness of the apostolic teaching and practice of Rom. 14:5: This one, (the believing Israelite) respects one day more than another, that one (the believing Gentile) keeps all days the same. But for centuries we have been entangled in the Sunday—compulsion of conscience, and now the pious Sabbatarians come and want to put on us the iron yoke of the Sabbath compulsion instead of the wooden one, —out of the frying pan into the fire! It would be funny if it were not so terribly sad.

But we must continue in our glorious chapter on the wonderfully blessed fact that the Holy Spirit has made His abiding dwelling in us throughout this age, as He has undertaken to glorify Christ in His believers. And with a patience and long-suffering incomprehensible to us, He bears untold mortifications, setbacks, restraints and dampenings of His blessed efficacy, sins— and relapses of the saddest kind, —and dwells! The First Epistle to the Corinthians reveals to us very vividly how alarming and sharply reprobable the low state of spiritual life is nevertheless compatible with the continuing indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I will never forget the deep impression that the words of a consecrated and blessed American Baptist preacher made on me 30 years ago. There was talk in the inner circle of the brethren about the sad conditions in the churches. Increasing secularization, practical lack of discipline, blunt unbelief in some scriptural truths, unforgiveness, party spirit and many other things

were mentioned. And serious voices were raised as to whether it was not time to leave and start a new one on the old lines of Scripture, —a remedy that has been praised many times and tried again and again for centuries, but which has always proved to be nothing but a —screw without end. Then that brother said: Dear brothers, as long as the Holy Spirit can endure it in my church and does not withdraw, I can also endure it! It seems to me that the brother had looked deeply into the love of the Spirit.

Now our apostle brings this dwelling of the spirit in the believers into a remarkable relation to our mortal corporeality. That all believers feel the same as a burden, a complaint, has its correctness and is biblically justified. But we must be careful that this does not lead to disdain or contempt for the body. Our apostle counters this with the words (1 Cor. 3:16, 17): *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ... the temple of God is holy, and such (temples) are ye. And again, know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make whoredoms of them (1 Cor. 6:15)? And again, for ye are dearly purchased: therefore with your bodies praise God (1 Cor. 6:20).*

On the other hand, the present word meets us: so the body is dead, for the sake of sin, of every threatening inclination and danger of overestimating our natural corporeality or of breeding pious, "holy" flesh. This danger is by no means to be minimized. It is greatly encouraged, for example, by all kinds of solemn and "consecratory" ceremonies at ordinations, consecrations, consecrations, dressing in "pious" costumes, taking vows, and the like. Such things also happen a lot in "evangelical" circles. In addition to this, there are many unsophisticated, over-spiritual and over-stepped sanctification movements, which aim at the complete redemption of the flesh, that is, of the ancestral nature.

Scripture counters all this with the sobering and liberating "the body is dead because of sin". There can be no doubt in the mind of the one who knows God the Almighty about the ability of our great Savior God to bring about a fundamental renewal and transformation of our visible, material corporeality in His saints and beloved ones and to thoroughly provide for "holy flesh". But his saying, his declared will is different, and that is the end of it: the body is a regular prey of death, even for the sanctified, for the sake of the sin dwelling in us. All seemingly pious attempts to create an irreconcilable opposition out of this, which would never be consistent with perfect divine holiness, that the Holy Spirit should dwell in a body temple which is not spotlessly pure and thoroughly freed from every inclination and impulse to sin and brought back to at least Adamic, paradisiacal purity and innocence, must be judged and rejected by that judgment of God: dead for the sake of sin.

But the spirit is life for the sake of righteousness. Which spirit? Surely the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the Spirit of power, love and discipline, the Spirit of grace and glory. He is the source, root, impulse and secret of the new resurrection life, begotten in us by the living, creative Word, the seed of rebirth.

And for the sake of justice. Whose justice? Certainly also our righteousness, so that it has an inviolable, indestructible basis for life, completely separate and independent of our own good and pious works or achievements. But in the deepest reason probably for the sake of God's righteousness, which is the main subject of this whole epistle to the Romans. God is to be and will be justified precisely in that he is and becomes the bearer and content of the new being and life of the new creation worked in us on the basis of the one and perfect sacrifice of Christ, by which all who are sanctified will be perfected in eternity. Precisely through the Lord Jesus, who has been proven in power as the Son of God by raising the dead, who is the head and original cause as the second and last Adam, who has thus become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). For only through this does God's holiness and righteousness remain eternally inviolable, even when he calls and installs cursed—and

death-worthy creatures as genuine, full-fledged sons of God, i.e. makes them essentially one with his only begotten, the reflection of his glory, the image of the invisible God.

But what does Paul further conclude for our mortal corporeality, for the very lodge that so weighs us down and makes us groan for redemption? As determinedly and clearly as he assigns the body to death, so boldly and confidently does he promise it immortal, imperishable being and life on the basis of the wonderful fact that this frail, sinful, fallible corporeality is the chosen temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. It is hard to imagine greater contrasts than that between the Holy Spirit of grace, power and glory and the dwelling place chosen by Himself, the dust-born, disgraceful, fragile human corporeality permeated by the forces of death. But our great God's thoughts surpass ours like the heavens surpass this earth. The solution of this contrast, which is completely satisfying to God's –spirit, we can be assured of, otherwise there would be no indwelling of God's spirit in earthen vessels of weakness and sinfulness, –has long since been found and guaranteed. It is not, of course, on the path of human ennoblement or perfection, be it moral, spiritual or physical, –nor on the ground of self-mortification, scourging, or flesh –and blood flesh. The word: The body *is dead for* sin's sake, put an effective stop to this. But now, precisely because the body is consecrated to death and is forfeited, it can and will and must be the object of bodily resurrection. Just as the Word, who was from the beginning, who was with God and God, became flesh only in order to be crucified, to die and be buried, and then to be raised triumphantly and exalted to the right hand of God. This is our apostle's resounding, invincible argument. This is the core and goal of the whole incomprehensible condescension of the Spirit of glory, who does not spurn us as a dwelling place and temple. Thereby it is guaranteed that also our mortal bodies will be made alive on that day, when our new life of the spirit, hidden with Christ in God, will burst forth –and break through and this body of nothingness will be transformed into complete conformity with Christ's own body of glory according to the working of power, so that he can subdue all things to himself, even dust and corruption (Phil. 3, 21).

It is probably also not by chance that the word here speaks of "mortal", but not of already dead bodies. (To cf. 1.Cor. 15, 54: this "mortal") This is certainly not meant to object to the resurrection also of the bodies that have really succumbed to death and decay. But the thought of the transformation of the body (like 1 Cor. 15, 51) or of being clothed (2 Cor. 5, 4) is brought to the foreground, a thought that unfortunately has not been received by most believers with the faithful–desire and longing that it deserves according to Scripture. The thought of one's own, personal blessed death has almost completely obscured it and moved it very far away from us. This is a pity. For it is not written in vain: By faith Enoch was caught up, so that he did not see death (Hebr. 11, 5). What is bound to faith does not happen magically or automatically.

Verse 12, 13

"Verse 12, 13: So then, brethren, we are not indebted to the flesh, that we live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye must die. But if by the Spirit ye put to death the business of the body, ye shall live."

It would be an aberration to conclude from the words of the twelfth verse that we, as believers and children of God born from above, have no obligations at all to the "flesh". For Father and Mother, to whom I owe my existence on earth according to the flesh, claim my gratitude, my obedience, my reverence according to the Scriptures, quite apart from my or their position to Christ. Even to completely unbelieving relatives who are hostile to God, a child of God must never deny these things. Thus, even as a new creature in Christ, I have duties, obligations and liabilities to the state and worldly authorities, to my professional or business associates, to my superiors or subordinates, to my

purely earthly or worldly neighbors or friends whose relations to me belong merely to this creation, i.e., to the "flesh," relations which are broken off forever with their or my departure from this world. However numerous, however real and binding these justified claims of the flesh to the child of God may be, the barrier is drawn to them here with a firm, expert hand in the greatest clarity and definiteness; even the mother who gave birth to me, the children whom God Himself gave me according to the flesh, they must never expect or demand that I live according to the flesh for their sake. There the sharp, double-edged word of Jesus comes into effect: Whoever does not hate father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and also his own soul, cannot be my disciple (Luk 14, 26). Whoever, as the dearly bought property of the Lord, agrees to any consideration, compromise or attempt at mediation, does it at the expense of his inner spiritual life, growth and prosperity. And many a child of God who, through carnal indulgence, has thought it would be easier to draw someone to the Lord's side, has had to recognize and lament with bitter disappointment, often too late, the fatal error in which he himself has suffered incalculable damage and has not benefited the Lord's cause, but has harmed it. It is not at all "spiritual" to defend one's position, or rather one's position in and toward Christ, with provocative sharpness, brusqueness or arrogance. Even a mild testimony, given in all humility and meekness, of the inner, fundamental bond with the crucified and exalted One, which excludes any pact with worldly beings, can be determined, manly and decisive.

That the word "so you must die" is to be taken neither in the merely physical sense nor also in the absolute sense of a sudden, complete extinction or loss of all and every spiritual life, results easily from the parallel expression in the following part of the sentence: so you will live. That this does not mean the new birth, the new creation according to the inner man, does not need to be proved. Every Christian knows from his own, often painful experience that there are differences and significant degrees between "living" and "living". But a decline, a wasting away, a failure in spiritual life is an inevitable consequence of life according to the flesh in a child of God. So the Lord also admonishes the church in Sardis: Be watchful and strengthen the rest that wants to die (Rev. 3:3). There can be such a low level of life from God that only the most severe judgments can awaken new life again (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

But what do the words mean to tell us, *"But if by the Spirit ye kill the business of the body?"* At any rate, the same want to be explained first from the contrast that preceded them. They are evidently intended to express the opposite of "living according to the flesh." In positive form and version they might simply read, "If ye live after the Spirit. But it is certainly not accidental that the apostle uses the present phrase here. It reminds us very vividly of his very similar speech in Col. 3, 5: Put to death your members that are on earth. Or in content to Rom. 6, 13: Neither put your members to service as weapons of unrighteousness. Or the even more complete comparison in Rom. 6, 16: Just as you have put your members (the organs of the body that take care of its "business") into the service of uncleanness and unrighteousness to do wrong, so now also put your members into the service of righteousness for sanctification.

All these instructions are given to those who, after apostolic instruction, have taken a stand in the obedience of faith on the precious fact that our old man was crucified together with Christ, so that the body of sin might be put away (Rom. 6, 6). To them the word applied: You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3, 3). And again, consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6, 11).

This prevents us from attaching to the present speech of the apostle the sense as if it were our business and task to effectively and legally put to death our old man or the sin in us and only in this way to pave our own way to a life of righteous justice and holiness. No, a thousand times no! For Christ alone has become final to us from God, as to righteousness, so to sanctification and (final) redemption (of the body) 1 Cor. 1:30. Therefore it is also said: *by the Spirit put to death* the business of the body—, not by our own wrestling, however hotly, with the old man, with indwelling sin,

whether by fasting, praying, or mortifying the flesh, but in the obedience of faith, i. e. i. e. in the spirit and power of the Risen Lord, looking away from ourselves and reckoning only with the powers of his death and his victorious resurrection. The word puts a stop to any attempted self-sanctification through pious exercises. But it means that we bring the "not I" of Gal. 2, 20 to constant practical implementation with full consciousness and under unsparing self-judgment in the power of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, who offers every ability, the willing and the accomplishment for this.

Verse 14-17

Verse 14– 17: For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of bondage, that you should fear again; but you have received a spirit of sonship, in which we cry out: Abba, Father! The same Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. If we are children, then we are also heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, –if we suffer differently, so that we may also be glorified.

These are great, weighty, content-rich words that deserve our most careful attention. First of all, there is the chapter about being *led by the Spirit, which* causes so much trouble for many of God's children. But what does the apostle mean here by being led by –the Spirit –of –God–? It has long been our clear conviction that most serious Christians understand it to mean something quite different from what the words imply. In believing circles, when we speak of being led by the Spirit, we probably refer in general to a certain ability and confidence in determining what is the undoubted will of God in given critical and very important questions and tasks, decisions and resolutions of life. Now we are very far from denying, neither that children of God should under all circumstances assure themselves of the good and perfect will of God in all circumstances of life before they take any important steps, nor even that our God is fully capable of keeping to His own even today the great and delicious promise already recorded in the book of Psalms: I will instruct thee, and show thee the way which thou shalt walk: I will guide thee with mine eyes (Ps. 32:8). In the same way, our apostle recommends to the Christians of Rome in the twelfth chapter of this letter (verse 2, 3) that they do not conform themselves to this world, but by renewing their minds awaken and strengthen the ability to examine what is the good, holy and perfect will of God. The question that concerns us, then, is not whether a child of God is given the possibility of clearly discerning the will of God in life, but whether what Paul here clearly describes as a characteristic and certain mark of every child of God is precisely that which is regarded by so many for spiritual guidance and is so highly regarded, namely, the faculty of being able to ascertain the will of God in decisive situations in life. This we deny, on the basis of the explanation given here, that all who are led by the Spirit of God are God's children.

We have just quoted a word of the Psalm which assures with great certainty such a fortune as the one mentioned above already to the pious and sincere God-fearing people of the Old Covenant. With it our opinion is already fastened ³. For on that ground there was not yet any "filiation" in the Pauline sense. All those pious ones were faithful and conscientious servants devoted to their God, but all of them still had the "spirit of fear" and could not have the "spirit of childship" at all, since Jesus was not yet transfigured. Paul would therefore most clearly contradict undoubted biblical truth if he wanted to claim that all those godly servants and handmaidens of Jehovah were genuine "sons of God" begotten of the spirit of Christ. A single glance at the obvious fact of the divine, sure, never-failing guidance of his people Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years with the pillar of cloud –and fire is fully sufficient to demonstrate the utter untenability of such a theory. The children of Israel, it is clear, had nothing to do but to look out of the door of their tabernacle every morning in order to determine with absolute certainty what was the way indicated to them

³ Note June– 2000: see also Heb. 5, 13, 14 Distinction occurs due to trained senses trained by solid food!

by God for that day, whether they should camp or go and where to. This knowledge, which was constantly guaranteed to them, did not prevent them, as all scripture testifies, from practicing all kinds of shameful idolatry in the most disgraceful way on this very migration! Does anyone still want to say that this was "spiritual guidance" in the Pauline sense? Certainly not.

Experience also confirms our point of view in this matter. Every insightful and experienced Christian has in his life already met serious, conscientious, very pious and God-fearing people in no small number who, in all the situations of their lives, with all sincerity, had no greater concern than to be assured that they had the good and perfect will of God on their side, to the best of their knowledge and conscience, in all the more important decisions of their everyday lives, whether in the family or in business or entirely on their own account. But to ascribe the spirit of sonship to these good and sincere people without further ado would be a very daring undertaking.

These are also not the people who claim that they are under "spiritual guidance" in the conventional sense. They probably attribute their decisions and resolutions in the last instance to the indwelling Holy Spirit in the very rarest of cases. It is usually quite far from them to make such a claim. However, this happens quite often to children of God who are truly begotten of the Spirit, who make something special out of it and want to be respected for the fact that they are guided directly and only by the Holy Spirit in all kinds of questions, even in very trivial little things, and who not infrequently claim to be allowed to dictate to others what and how they should act and do their work, because the Holy Spirit has clearly revealed to them that this and that is the will of God. In this area, in very determined and sanctified circles, a great deal of mischief and abuse is done with the Pauline word of the guidance of the Spirit, and yet has nothing at all to do with it. Not infrequently the word of God is used as a kind of oracle or rather misused. Individual sayings, either drawn by lot, or brought under the eyes in some other purely mechanical or idiosyncratic way, are supposed to mean the will of God in given cases.

Now, again, it is not to be denied that our great God has many a time met his simple-minded children in such a way with determination, in correct, divine estimation of their undeveloped and quite unclarified inner faculty of knowledge. Thus, for example, we find that the apostles of the Lord themselves made use of the lot *before Pentecost in order* to arrive at the clear knowledge of God's will in the choice of a substitute apostle in place of Judas. But that was also the last time that we read such a thing from them. Now it is by no means a sign of very mature knowledge if even today in very believing circles one still falls back on the Old Testament way of drawing lots. And yet this practice, like so many others, has assumed such a scope in the most earnest Christendom, and is surrounded with such a nimbus of special piety and holiness, that one must almost not dare to touch it for fear of coming into the odor of sacrilege. But we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. And this, according to our deepest conviction, points us to other and better paths. It cannot be our task at this point to illuminate in detail the question of how, under certain circumstances, or even always, one could attain full clarity and certainty about the will of God in all kinds of earthly matters. Only this much may be said, no one is more firmly and deeply convinced than the writer of these lines that our God even today still knows how to masterfully make known to us His undoubted will in such an overwhelmingly clear and unambiguous manner that we have no way out but either to obediently follow all these beckonings and instructions or to consciously reject His guidance and decree. It has been his experience, however, that it does not at all require all conceivable efforts or endeavors to come to full clarity, but only a single-minded eye, i.e. a complete willingness to let the Father guide and direct us under all circumstances, no matter what it may cost. Then you will experience that you do not need to draw lots or other oracles with the Bible, but that everything "happens" in the most natural way. It is not so much a matter of our doing and striving, but of our becoming still before HIM, so that HE can do. Once all our own desires, plans, plans and hopes are really with us on the cross, then the whole thing is already done. It depends also with calm consideration

much less on the fact that we always hit the right thing, than that we *never want to go our own way*. Our recognition and judgment is and remains, even with the purest heart, piecemeal and imperfect, limited and insufficient. And our God has nowhere promised us that he wants to make us infallible in judgment and protect us from every error of judgment under all circumstances. But this many dear children of God seem to think almost a foregone conclusion, if we may infer from the obstinacy with which they try to enforce their supposed ways received directly from the Holy Spirit. It is undoubtedly very good and salutary when we err quite thoroughly in our judgment and nudge, since our God often enough has no more effective way of setting us right than that of giving us a proper nudge. But enough of this subject.

We come back to our question: What is understood here by the guidance of the Spirit? The answer to this is contained in the promise of the Lord: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). If it were only half as much for all God's children to give the Holy Spirit free course in this, as it is for them to always order their life affairs correctly and in accordance with God, then things would be significantly better in God's church on earth. Then there would be more maturity and maturity in spiritual and divine things and much less servile bondage to human opinions, theological concepts and sentences.

This is a sure and unmistakable characteristic of all true children of God, when they allow the Spirit of Truth to open up to them, without reservation and without cutting back, the whole glorious fullness of God's revelation of the Son, and thus gain insight into the organic connections of Scripture, which effectively protects them from all narrowness and narrowness and makes it impossible for them to be merely concerned only about their own salvation. Out of the dear pious "I", and into the great glorious Christ of God, who is given to us as the head over the whole universe and not only as our personal "dear Savior". Whoever seeks his own life will lose it. He who loses it for his own sake will find it. Christian perfection, the measure of the full growth of the Christ, the perfect man, does not lie on the line of the most scrupulous and careful cultivation of individual salvation, but only on the line drawn here by the apostle of inevitable, simple –allowing oneself to be –led into the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God hidden in him. So alone are we transfigured into the same image from clarity to clarity by the Lord, the life-giving Spirit. For no one knows what is in God except the Spirit of God. And you have, John tells us, the anointing from the Holy One and know all things, i.e. have free, unhindered access to all depths and heights, lengths and breadths of divine knowledge and love in Christ Jesus, the head of his whole body, the head over all things in heaven and on earth.

There is truly much room for repentance and deep bowing in the face of the disdainful rejection that the Holy Spirit so often has to experience from us, who does not even want to speak of himself, even though he would understand this masterfully and could also make himself understood to us quite directly. He knows and wants to know no other task than that of revealing to us the whole Christ of the Scriptures, which he himself has interwoven and concealed with indescribable skill and perfect mastery, a folly to the wise and prudent, a never-ending source of light and delight to the underage. There is a touching tragedy in the fact that the Holy Spirit is always expected, as indicated above, to speak out of himself or to make himself heard in order to influence our judgments and resolutions, While he is constantly waiting for every opportunity to be given to him to lead us into the whole of the written revelation, which we are much less interested in, since we have been taught to be concerned only with our "own salvation". "He will take it from mine and proclaim it to you"⁴. And the "His" are just the writings that testify to Him, especially the whole Old Testament, so step-motherly treated by today's Christians, often so badly regarded and so little used. And yet it is in them that almost all the actual glory of –Christ still lies locked and hidden, to be revealed only in His

⁴ Note July –2000: Joh. 16, 14, 15

time. "For all things must be fulfilled which are written of him in the law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the psalms." And with unspeakable patience the Holy Spirit, in all who have received Him, waits for them to let Him do His longed-for service. Blessed is he who lets him guide him into all truth. He seals it that God is true in every word that has gone out of his mouth.

But further. The apostle now makes the calm and clear declaration: *You have not received a spirit of bondage, that you should fear again, but the spirit of adoption*. Why is this believed so little in the believing church? Because if one truly believed it, one would not be constantly eager to ask for the Holy Spirit first, one would simply count on his presence and his indwelling with us. The so-called spiritual hymns once again testify against themselves that they are not at all "spiritually" oriented, because most Pentecostal hymns sung today assume that the Holy Spirit must first come, even to the true believers. Paul had already told us so impressively in the ninth verse of this chapter: "*But whoever does not have Christ's Spirit is not his*". There can be no real, genuine Christ-life in us without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. After all, the whole congregation of believers and saints on earth is nothing more than the second volume of the life of our glorious Lord in heaven, since we are all members of His body. Therefore, if Christ is truly alive and active on this poor earth, it is only in those who have received His Spirit and have become His lawful temples. And it is quite improper, not to use a much harsher expression, if from the midst of this very congregation living in the Spirit and inhabited and sustained by the living Spirit, Christ, the Holy Spirit is addressed and even besieged with requests that he should come and make his abode with us, since our whole existence and life is a single proof that the Holy Spirit is truly here. It is readily admitted that he cannot be as effective and unfold his glorious activity among us as he would like. But the obstacle is not that he has to come at all, but only our unbelieving attitude towards his undoubted presence. There is truly a need for deep bowing and thorough repentance and an outspoken rejection of all the unbelieving speeches and songs, prayers and sermons that put it into the mouths of believers to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit, through whom alone they have long since learned to say Abba Father.

Clearly and powerfully expressed in this statement of the apostle is the tremendous distance and contrast between the ministry of the letter and that of the Spirit, as he presents the matter in Second Corinthians chapter 3. The fact that many true believers still lack a clear and conscious distinction here, that one still finds such a strong tendency among believers, as among the Galatian Christians of the first time, to deal with works of the law again, is partly explained by the fact that one has just tried to coin from the New Testament church only a new edition of the people of Israel. This alarming shift of concepts has caused an unspeakable amount of darkness and clouding of the view, from which it is not very easy to become free; especially since the spell of legalism is a very powerful one, since it finds a mighty support in the natural striving of our own ego to be valid and to achieve something. We must be on our guard and not allow ourselves to be yoked into a yoke of bondage again, but to persevere in the glory of the freedom of the children of God, which has been bought for us at such a high price. Free from the law, free from the spirit of bondage and fear! Fear is not in love. Complete love casts out fear.

Then Paul goes on to speak of a precious fact, the *witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit that we are God's children*. If this is so, then it is once again quite obvious that there can be no question of any pious performance or activity on our part. We are quite receptive, i.e. the recipients, not the effectors or producers.

The exact literal translation of these words makes this a little clearer to us than the conventional ones. They read: The spirit itself witnesses to our spirit that we are God's children. There is clearly talk of a co-witnessing of the Holy Spirit. Question: Who or what is the other witness? It goes without saying that we ourselves cannot be the witness, because the witnessing is addressed to us, but in no sense does it come from us. We should and may have the delicious testimony and assurance, but we cannot give it to ourselves. That would make it completely worthless. It seems to us that the

right answer lies on the same line that is drawn in the word of the Lord already mentioned above, namely that the Holy Spirit at His coming will not speak from Himself or of Himself, but will take it from His own and proclaim it to us. Let us confidently make use of this also here, and we will certainly not go wrong. This would then mean that that precious testimony of our true filiation comes about by the fact that not the Holy Spirit alone, by any immediate influences or impressions, moods or feelings, as he would certainly be able to effect them, but in and with and *through the word of truth, of which* he himself is the author, imparts and vouches for this delicious assurance to us. In other words, the activity of the Holy Spirit on and in the believers is, according to his own good pleasure, absolutely bound to the existing and written word of divine revelation and only determined and supported by the same. I.e., it is the Spirit of Truth again, who, in reading and hearing the Scriptures, opens our ears and hearts to the truth in a way that the word heard or read thus makes us spirit and life, that just in it we have the firm and infallible assurance that we have been seized by God for Christ, that we belong to those whom the Father has given to the Son for His portion and inheritance out of the present evil world, according to the good pleasure of His will. And so, in normal succession, one by one, all the riches of the revealed Christ are revealed to us in such a way that we not only have life and full sufficiency in Him, but are also transformed and transformed into His own image by the Lord, the Spirit. This co-witnessing of the Holy Spirit, then, is not at all a mystical, mysterious, uncertain something that would be produced in our inner being directly by the Spirit of God and maintained by Him alone, but a quite natural, almost self-evident process, such as we can observe over and over again on the ground of natural life in every healthy family. How do the children of an earthly father come to the certainty that this is their father and they his beloved children? Not by any supernatural, mystical influence, still less by any natural function originating from themselves, but merely by hearing day after day the loving voice of the father and the mother and taking it into themselves and thus confirming it that it is truth and not a lie that that pair of parents proves to be theirs and calls them with justification his children. They bring nothing but childlike trust to the parents, and the parents do not desist from revealing themselves and their love for them every day anew. So here too. We bring nothing to our Father but childlike trust given to us by the Spirit, which comes from the believed Word. The Father uses every new opportunity we give Him to hear His voice, to prove and assure us that He has begotten us by the Word of truth according to His will, and has given us authority to become His children who believe in His name. All this *from the Word and through the Word from His mouth*, made alive to us by the Holy Spirit and made accessible to us in a way that our own minds could never achieve or imitate.

Of what great practical importance for our life of faith and especially also for our walk in the world is this clear confidence, wrought by the Spirit through God's Word, that we are really genuine, recognized children of the living Father, is obvious to every child of God as if by itself. Without such a clear consciousness of status, a dignified, status-appropriate walk is not possible at all. If, however, I am continually carried and permeated by the God-inspired conviction that God has truly begotten me of the Spirit and has given me filial rights and the power of sonship, then I have great joy and confidence at all times to enter the Holy of Holies and am also able to give account to everyone who demands the reason for the hope that is in me. However, I always keep in mind that the world does not know us, as little as it has known Him until this day, and that our life is hidden with Him in God. But we know what is given to us by God.

With verse 17, the apostle now leads us to the summit of his Song of Songs about our sonship in Christ. The bold, but absolutely correct and godly conclusion is: *If we are now children, then heirs, namely God's heirs and co-heirs of Christ*. This is neither to be shaken nor to be interpreted. God simply wants to be believed, nothing more. The fact that this seems incomprehensible and unfathomable to our natural feeling and thinking is no proof that it could not be true and reliable. It is

so much more worthy of God. Because his thoughts are so much higher than ours, as the sky is higher than the earth.

So this is the content and the scope of the wonderful offer of our great Savior God to a world that is in trouble, that has rejected his beloved Son at the instigation of Satan and has cut him on the cursed wood, that thinks and thinks only of alienation from God to this day. And no matter to what depths of hatred of God and hostility to Christ a blinded man may have fallen. He can and should, by faith alone in the grace that brings salvation to all men, without any further precondition, without any moral or religious achievement or effort, immediately attain authority to filiation, to participation in the divine nature, to inheritance with the most high God, who possesses heaven and earth, and to co-heirship with the Only—the Father, the firstborn among many brethren. Truly, this is glad tidings, this is exuberant knowledge, overflowing grace, unfathomable love.

There one stands also before an enormous puzzle, if one reads that the same wonderfully gracious and glorious God allows his most bitter enemy, the adversary, the father of the lie, the murderer from the beginning, to blind the senses of the unbelieving people that they do not see the bright light of the clarity of God in the face of Jesus Christ. One wonders: How can God, who after all is omnipotent and could certainly have prevented this, (as certainly as he will once bind and prevent the same Satan for 1000 years to deceive and beguile the nations) prepare such a tremendous obstacle for his glorious work in the gospel of the Sonship? For it is obvious that one must not speak of a mere passive allowance. God has too much at stake for the highest interests of his only begotten Son, whose own "body" it is after all, that he should not have done everything in the most prudent and effective way not only to secure the greatest possible success, but also to meet all possible obstacles and oppositions in the most successful manner. Can there be any other answer to such a question, certainly justified by the whole state of affairs, than that our great God is infallibly certain of the final glorious outcome of His grandly conceived event, decided in the Son (together with the Sons), indeed that HE has made these very machinations of darkness and falsehood, of malice and hatred, absolutely serviceable only to His inscrutable purposes? If Paul is right that God —gives a wonderful visual lesson of His manifold wisdom to the church, that is, to the family of true children of God, to the principalities and powers in the heavenly regions, to —which, according to Eph. 6:12, the world rulers of this darkness, the spiritual powers of wickedness, are also undoubtedly to be counted, then there are connecting lines that are well worth our chaste, but faithful attention. God does not order such mighty things in vain, i.e. without knowing what will finally come out of it for him. Because all his works are conscious to him from the beginning.

Such considerations can only help us. These reliable divine promises comfort us all the more deeply, the more the machinations of darkness increase, the closer we hurry to the end of the course of time, which is dedicated to the gathering and full preparation of the church of children of the living God from all nations under heaven. Who or what can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord?

"If children, heirs."

The principle has also been recognized as almost self-evident in all human legal systems. Where there are children, there is no need to look for other heirs. Their claims to the estate are undisputed. So here.

But what does that mean: God's heirs? Is this not another Pauline exuberance and extravagance, a too bold conclusion that is not to be taken literally? One could have justified doubts, if it did not immediately continue: *co-heirs of Christ*. With this, the matter is made unshakably firm. For God appointed Him as heir over all things visible and invisible, whether thrones, principalities, dominions, powers; all things were created for Him, as through Him and for Him, and all things endure

only in Him (Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 8:4 –6). But when he says that everything is subject to the Son, only he is excluded who has subjected everything to him.

Now, however, an heir is not yet an owner, but has only the legally valid claim to the future possession and the free disposal of everything. Thus in the glorious words of the heir lies at the same time the highest guarantee of future power and majesty, but also the firm bar against any inclination or impulse to force oneself in any way into at least partial possession, as has unfortunately become the evil custom in the wide Christianity, since one obeys the fatal delusion, as if the church of Christ of this course of time is already the promised kingdom of God on earth, resp. It has the right of determination— and order in all worldly matters and is called upon to bring about kingdom conditions everywhere among the peoples. The bird in this play has undoubtedly been shot by the American Christians who, under the leadership of their President Wilson, have admittedly entered into the great, most gruesome of all world wars up to now, for no other purpose than that of bringing about the promised kingdom of justice and peace on the whole earth and putting an end to all war and all oppression and tyranny forever, through the victory of Christian democratism. With what success will soon become obvious. One does not need to be a prophet or a prophet's son, however, in order to put an end with horror in firm prospect of such a presumptuous undertaking. He who laughs in heaven, the Lord mocks them. There one may laugh well with.

But there is more to the concept of inheritance. An inheritance always means a great task and responsibility, which increases with the value and extent of the inheritance. He is an unworthy and contemptible heir who wants to use the paternal property only for the satisfaction of his own lusts or desires and to make the whole inheritance only a means of increased hedonism. Now, when it is written that God has set the Son as heir over the universe, and that we children are to be his co-heirs, this cannot possibly mean anything else than that we will have to share with the great, glorious Son the whole incomprehensible responsibility for the future administration and orderly government of the whole universe. There every thought of mere mental or even spiritual enjoyment must be eliminated if we do not want to make ourselves contemptible from the outset in the eyes of the heavenly hosts over whom we shall one day have judgment and supreme administration under the head, the only begotten Son. It is probably time for believers to thoroughly clean up all the emotional—and pleasure dreaming and to seriously deal with the big question: How do I have to prepare myself for the solution of the enormous tasks in the future kingdom of our exalted Lord, which also await me in my part and which include heaven and earth, whose co-heir everyone is in his appointed part. We have been made capable by the Father for such a share, i.e. the Father has left us the whole great inventory, the whole all-embracing inventory of everything that belongs to the future ruler —and area of administration of the "heir over ALL", in writing in the most exact detail. Every worthy heir, who is aware of the high responsibility which the assumption of his inheritance implies, naturally makes himself familiar with all individual items and possessions, valuable objects, buildings, papers etc. in the most careful way. Otherwise he will never be able to meet and fulfill his high moral responsibility. How lamentable, then, sounds the motto, so popular and considered so tremendously pious: "Only blessed!" which one so readily hangs on the wall as a self-reflection of one's own humility and modesty. Down with such unworthy, insincere masks, behind which only ordinary unbelief hides, which does not want to exceed the costs, which it brings with it, if one takes the divine offer of sonship completely seriously.

And now follows another serious clause to the high word of our joint-heir with Christ: *"If we suffer with others, that we may also be glorified with them."* Every enlightened child of God will agree without hesitation that this must be so, indeed cannot be otherwise. For the sufferings of Christ were the indispensable precondition of his glorification. Only through Golgotha did the way lead to his exaltation above all names, powers, authorities and dominions (Phil. 2, 9– 11). There can be no way around this for us. In the divine council of love we are planted together with Him to the same

death, we are crucified with Him. And the Father has taken care that the whole congregation of all centuries of the present age should not lack opportunities to sympathize with Christ. It serves this purpose that for all of us the law of sin and death is suspended, so that no child of God has *to* sin or die, but both are present to us, and this constant presence of our inherent sinfulness and mortality is a never-ending source of deep sorrow for every child of God who knows himself to be in possession of eternal life and divine righteousness and holiness in Christ. This is also served by the constant need for vigilance and readiness for battle, which must never flag, not with flesh and blood, but with rulers and powers, with the world rulers of this darkness, with the spiritual wickedness powers in the heavenly regions. This is the purpose of the unavoidable discrediting and hostility that every true child of God encounters from the children of the world, especially the pious according to the flesh, often their own closest relatives and friends. The fact that God does not want to educate us to perfection in seclusion and selfish isolation from others, but in the fellowship of the saints, most of whom are at least as strange as we ourselves, serves this purpose, since we give one so much to bear to the other, and since there is never a lack of opportunities for us to priestly take on our shoulders the unpardoned woes and miseries and folly and wrongdoings of others, and to bear them silently before God and to answer for them as if they were our own debts. The all-wise Father has taken care in such an extensive way that not a single generation of true children of God has ever lacked the possibility of having plenty of the suffering of Christ. So that one cannot even see how dear brethren can talk about the fact that the last generation of the church from the world of nations waiting for their Lord must have a special "Gethsemane and Golgotha" in the days of the reign of terror of the man of sin. Why should those then living alone enjoy this distinction, if it is one? But if they have had their equal share in the real sufferings of the Christ with the saints and elect of all ages, surely there is no need of such special status? And no one will be able to deny that it was possible before to have really much of the suffering of Christ.

Verse 18-25

Verse 18 –25: "For I hold that the sufferings of the last time are not to be considered in comparison with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the eager expectation of the creature longs for the revelation of the children of God. For the creature is ⁵subjected to mortality, not voluntarily, but by Him who subjected it, in hope that it too, the creature, shall be delivered from the bondage of mortality to the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans along and lies in travail until now. And not only they, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we too groaningly await the sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For it is in hope that we have been saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees he no longer hopes for. But if we hope for that which we see not, we wait for it in patience."

The apostle's judgment in the comparison between the sufferings of the present time and the glory to come is that of an expert in both fields. It is he who was allowed to write to the Colossians: I rejoice in the sufferings for you, enduring vicariously the rest of the tribulations of Christ for His body, which is the church. To the Corinthians he was allowed to testify: "We are oppressed in all places, but not crushed, ... we are persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but we do not perish. We always carry the death of Jesus in our bodies, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:8 ff). Again, in the same epistle he can speak of appearances and revelations of the Lord, as he was caught up to the third heaven, to paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which no man is privileged to say (2 Cor. 12, 1–4). It was the divine good pleasure to reveal his Son to all sides in this small, inconspicuous Jew, so that he alone could dare to say: Follow me, as I follow Christ. So we now take his testimony on faith with the sober assurance that this man of God was entirely under the discipline of the Spirit of Truth, who never allowed him to give his own fantasies

⁵ Aug –2000 note: For the sake of our sin; we could not survive if it were still in the state before Adam's Fall.

the weight of divine revelations. A very similar judgment is indeed that contained in 2 Cor. 4:17, 18: For our tribulation, which is temporal and light, procures for us an eternal glory that is weighty beyond all measure, for –us who do not look on the visible but on the invisible. And again it is said in 1 Cor. 2:9: As it is written: Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the mind of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But to us God has revealed it through his Spirit.

The Son of God had already spoken of this with His Father: "Father, I want those whom You have given Me to be with Me, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). And the disciple, who was allowed to record this holy will of the Son before the Father, made us understand: Beloved, we are now children of God, and has not yet appeared what we will be. But we know when He will appear, that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Beyond this, there can be no glory. For the Son is the reflection of the glory of the invisible God, the image of His being. To be transfigured into the same image, to be conformed to Him, higher and loftier, nobler and more majestic can never exist. And this is the glory that the Father of the same has intended for those who believe in the Son of God, whether they already bear all the shame and disgrace and are aware of it, that today they still bear the image of the earthly, the first fallen Adam. This is incomprehensible but divine.

And where does the more distant train of thought of the apostle lead us now? The context of his speech is not interrupted in any way. What follows is calculated and intended to serve us as an insight into the character of the very glory to which we are destined and called as true sons of God. And what comes there? One would expect a very grand enumeration and demonstration of all the high, heavenly beings and creatures, the strong heroes of God, the mighty, indomitable hosts of most powerful angels, seraphim, cherubim, and whatever they are called, before Him who created them all and calls them by name. A glowing, radiant description of the beauties, lovelinesses, riches, treasures and goods of the heavenly worlds, the dwellings of those millions of holy angels. At least the thoughts of most Christians, whether they are poets or only read and sing poems, go with an insistence in this direction that one would think there could be no other for our longing and hoping for the glory to be revealed. And where do the words of Scripture point us? Not up and up above all the heavens, but down into the misery of the groaning creature, which writhes in travail to this very day. At first, this does not exactly taste like heaven and bliss, if our taste formation has been a correct one. However, I have long strongly suspected that it is not biblically oriented and attuned. There it is massively and palpably before us: the tense expectation of the creature longs for the revelation of the children of God. This is unmistakably the apostolic guiding thought for the whole now following treatise. And of the beautiful heaven with all the lovely winged angels and other charming creatures is also not mentioned with one syllable. Whether our guide has grasped and reproduced the matter quite correctly? He himself, as we have just seen, was once enraptured into paradise, and even if he was not allowed to reproduce the words he heard there, he must still have been present in the spirit and must have remained there, what he saw there of the redeemed creature. For the paradise is not to be thought at all without a creature freed from the bonds of mortality and bondage. The theological invention that a part of the realm of the dead is the paradise, which is quite tasteless and cannot be supported by a single thread of scriptural testimony, is just a little medieval human fancy and smells completely of dusty folios behind which bookworms do their business.

And what does the eighth Psalm say and sing and rejoice about the Son of Man, first humbled but then highly exalted? You will let him rule over the works of your hands, you have put everything under his feet. What will come then? Again, not angels or archangels, cherubim or seraphim, but the whole and well-known array of creatures we readily dismiss as "unreasonable": sheep and oxen all, plus the wild beasts, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea that roam the seas. Jehovah our Ruler,

how glorious is your name in all the earth! Has one also ever found in our "spiritual song collections" such outpourings as the Holy Spirit here causes to flow into the mouth and pen of the psalmist? Who, then, among our very pious and most devout Christians, can be at all enthusiastic about the animal world and find great in the fact that the Son of Man should one day, as the second and last Adam, exercise real dominion over all these many teeming creatures of his Father, out of which we hardly know how to make much more than riding—and beasts of burden and animals for slaughter, which we make to taste good, and as very useful suppliers of fabulous footwear and of warm clothes and of all-lovely feathers and little feathers for the women to adorn their hats, etc.? And yet our great Creator God must have had something great in mind at that time, when He ordained that man, whom He formed in His image, should rule over all this colorful, rich creation.

What do we understand of it at all? Who of our most learned scholars and natural scientists can tell us even from a single little worm in the dust or a single bird on the roofs or from one of the billions of silent fish in the depths of the sea, what the thought of God was, which found its appropriate expression in this creature? Or did God thoughtlessly let all these things become just by themselves? Is not every work of God, however small, an expression of his holy and perfect will and plan? Yes, once upon a time, oh how far it lies behind us, there was a man on earth, the crown of the whole creation, the image of the living God, even if formed from earth dust, who knew how to read in the book of creation. That belonged to his created nobility, to his royal dignity, that he could call every being, which came into being on God's creator word, with his right name. And to be able to name something means to control it. Who can do that today? It is a Babylonian confusion of all conceivable, terribly learned sounding names which our highly praised natural science likes to assign to the animals. There it can become blue and green before the eyes from all the scientific designations. But what do they tell us of God's thoughts which have found their expression in the beings? Also not even a shadow of an idea we have more of it. We are dreadfully low sunk majesties. That is also clearly visible here. Only what we fabricate ourselves, inkwells, umbrellas, pins and all kinds of dead stuff we can call with names, from which one notices what they are there for. But not even to our own children, who are our flesh and blood, can we attach proper names that denote their true nature and occupation in life. We could just as well stick on ourselves and them paper numbers, by which one can distinguish us from others, they say as much as the great and meaningless and quite twisted names, which we and our children carry around all our lives, indelible markers of our lowliness. And this is proudly called reasonable mankind, educated mankind, scientific mankind! Who laughs there? All should, that would be right, and be ashamed of it.

Even more. What, then, do we find in those marvelous living creatures that form the very throne chariot of the heavenly Creator Majesty? Of their four faces, only one is human. Next to it, on the same height, is the bull, the lion, the flying eagle. What have they to do there? Yes, who of us proud people would only know that. But one thing is certain, there they are, and they will probably remain so, whether this society is quite congenial to us or not. Because our God has also with the animal creation still completely unfathomable thoughts, otherwise they would be truly not there, where it concerns his glorious power development, as from the book of the revelation is to be recognized clearly. We will probably still have to relearn what concerns our appreciation of the now still groaning creature. We will certainly not get away with never getting tired of singing and sighing: Away, away from here to heaven! And even if we want to appear so pious that we are so "heavenly" minded. As if any decent person would not rather have it heavenly than desperately bad and earthly. But that is far from being heavenly minded. It means that we should be like the Son of Man, the Son of God, who understood the Father better than our most pious theologians and poets with all their glorifications of heaven, which they have never seen. What God thinks of His creation, **thinking after Him**, that belongs to the heavenly mind. Thinking not only of one's own exuberant enjoyment of unspeakable bliss at every turn.

Even more. Has this nothing to tell us that the Scriptures, that faithful mirror of the true thoughts of our God, speak of a Lamb of God, of a Lion of Judah, that they make the personal Holy Spirit appear in the form of a dove? Are these designations, taken from the animal creation, appropriate or altogether inappropriate and inadequate? Surely it would be a piece of presumption to want to assert the latter. But if their choice cannot be objected by us, even if we may not be able to estimate them correctly, then there must be something pronounced in the nature of these creatures which harmonizes with the divine nature and therefore can be chosen as a symbol for the same. That one makes a virtue out of necessity, yes, happens. But that we want to make one out of our bottomless ignorance in this area, we should rather leave that. Let us rather bow under the written word and take our reason captive under the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). After all, it is not that far off.

To complete what has been said about God's thoughts with the creature to be liberated, we may also refer to prophecies such as Isa. 11:6 –8: *"The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard with the kid. The calf, the young lion and the fatling will be together, so that a little boy will drive them. The cow and the she-bear will graze together and lay their young together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant shall play by the hole of the adder, and the weaned shall stretch forth his hand to the basilisk's den."* These are lovely and pleasant pictures of a happy time, when the mortal enmity between animal and man, as well as between animal and animal, will be abolished. This is the lost and restored paradise, where the Crucified promised that the repentant criminal would meet him at his side.

And there are, even if few, nevertheless meaningful samples of the originally God-willed dominion of man over the creature, which we meet in the life of Jesus. Who is he, say the dismayed disciples on the sea of Tiberias, which was just now roaring and threatening, but has now become calm, that the wind and the sea are obedient to him? We have still not come this far with all our hot, heroic struggle for supremacy over the forces of nature. Our windmills already drove the winds and our sailors too, but woe to our proud buildings when the devastating hurricane rushes along, uprooting forest giants or blowing them down like matches. And to our word, as full as we may take the mouth, they have only scornful howling as an answer. The treacherous flood of water, which gurgles with delight when it has again swallowed a "lord of creation," the Son of Man and his disciple must obediently bear it at the Master's word. Cast the net to the right of the ship and you will make a catch. And without a loud word the willing inhabitants of the deep go into the disciple's net. The Master needs a donkey's fill never used for carrying burdens, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled. Who knows the oriental graycoat, knows how different it is from our tame long-eared donkey. But despite all the noise and cheering of the intoxicated crowd, the animal, which knows its master in him, carries him calmly into the excited city of the daughter of Zion. These are only a few samples of the willing submission of the creature to the Son of Man. To whom this does not seem "heavenly" and "spiritual" enough, we do not want to argue with him; but to us this seems far more heavenly than all sweet and sensitive talk of blissful feelings in which one wants to revel and intoxicate oneself, and for which the dear little angels are supposed to provide the decorations and the spheres the music. If winds are his angels and flames of fire his servants, according to the Scriptures, which cannot be broken, then some piously –aesthetic fancies will probably have to go the way of all flesh. Our God is a very great practical realist, who takes over from the creaturely corporeality, for whose existence he himself all responsibility ever and ever, and does not push it at all to the devil or to the demons and the "aeons" of the Gnostics. He has a completely different conception of corporeality than the super-spiritual pious of our days, who would like to spiritualize everything that is written, and who have a strangely low conception of the material creation, almost as if we had fabricated it.

When he lets his inspired prophet prophesy about the future reorganization of things, about the completely new culture, art, science and technology, then he speaks: I will bring gold instead of ore, silver instead of iron, but instead of wood ore and instead of stones iron. Not instead of ore, stone

and wood, wonderful sensations, exuberant moods, delightful ideas and images of ideas. Corporeality is the end of his ways. God, "revealed in the flesh," is the highest stage of his manifestation of himself to mankind and to the angelic world. From the dust of the earth his own image. This is God's method and goal.

Does one have then from Bible or nature any proof of it that there can and should be somewhere or sometime in the whole area of the divine creation beings, states and conditions which differ in the deepest reason according to their existence fundamentally from what we know and have here on the earth and her sky? The astronomy gives only one testimony for the fact that also the most shining celestial bodies consist of exactly the same gases, substances, atoms or molecules as our globe. One stretches, nevertheless, once his imagination before the highest-flying carriage to imagine "heavenly" conditions, will one ever be able to come beyond what this our earth would be, if only no sin, no death, no ruin, no suffering and no clamor would be here? What kind of language vessels does the spirit of prophecy use when it comes to the description of the city of God, which has the foundations? Certainly, if one has the courage to reinterpret all this into mood and pious feeling, what is spoken there of golden streets, of noble and shining stones and precious pearls, then one may do it. But then also stop taking God's word at face value in any other place. If these are not realities, where else can they be? We already do far too much raving, fantasizing and dreaming here. Then comes the kingdom of the imperishable realities, which are not exposed to any death, no more withering and fading in eternity.

The language of the apostle is mysterious to us when he speaks of the tense expectation of the creature. How little we understand their longing, how little we care about their unspoken but certainly deeply felt pain. We judge her sighs and her moving contractions from above. How we have so completely forgotten that we human children are the only ones to blame for their misery, their subjection to mortality and transience. For the creature has not sinned, but we have. How loud and moving is this silent sermon of suffering through no fault of her own, which she has to endure for our sake. And isn't this the same kind of suffering, the uncaused suffering, that affected her royal Lord for our sake? Undoubtedly.

And the word declares that their expectation is longing for the revelation of the sons of God. Is this not again a just reproach to so many children of God, who have managed not even to long for their "revelation", but only for the hour in which they turn their backs on the frightened creature and want to retire to the "beautiful heaven" to the angels, where they only wallow in pure bliss, but do not want to care at all about the creature that has remained behind. What becomes of it, in it nothing interests them, if **they** are only blessed! But the great Creator —and Savior God, who subjected the creature to mortality out of mercy towards us, hears and hears their longing and will neither forget nor neglect it. The Lord has mercy on all his works, even on the groaning unreasonable creature. It is subjected to hope, we read. And even if our understanding of such a creaturely hope is very limited and undeveloped, His is all the better for it, for the Father has put all things under His feet and given Him authority over all flesh.

Do we ever imagine what a terrible fate this would have been for mankind, if the rest of the creature, which had not sinned, had remained immortal all around us, in eternal youthfulness and strength? How much more bitter would dying have become for us, if we, the appointed masters of the creature, had had to pay tribute to death again and again, and she would have been free of it. How would we then have hated it, cursed it, cursed it, and yet could not have harmed it. Every whirling praise of the feathered singers an obnoxious mockery of us servants of the fear of death. It was an indescribable grace and kindness of God when he subdued the creature with. And how thankful we may be that it happened "in hope," as it is written.

For the creature also shall be set free from the bondage of mortality unto the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

We can't even imagine and think about it yet. The mere thought of immortal animals, horses, dogs, birds, fishes, seems to us so outrageous, so almost tasteless, that we have not familiarized ourselves with it at all. And nevertheless their archetypes and representatives have already been for eons in the cherubim the carriers and witnesses of divine creator glory and –majesty. We have hardly paid attention to that. But these true words of God must not be emptied or stripped of their simple literal sense by us because our trains of thought have not moved along such lines for all kinds of reasons, and not always the noblest and best ones. We have been too refined "spiritually" to appreciate sufficiently these very materially and plastically directed words. We are just terribly burdened by the conventional, philosophical treatment –more properly, mistreatment of –all biblical terms and concepts. The ancient, pagan dualism philosophized into creation, according to which only spirit is good, but matter is inherently ⁶evil, sits horribly deep in today's Christian thinking. This confronts us with poignant clarity when we consider such words as these. There is still much to be relearned.

With healthy indignation F. Bettex in his splendid book: "Symbolism of Creation and Eternal Nature" turns against this naughtiness of the evaporation of biblical realities: "A natural and above all a bodily heaven teaches the Bible. For God has created man according to body, soul and spirit and wants to receive him once in his kingdom according to body, soul and spirit, to entertain him, to refresh him and to make him infinitely and eternally happy. But because this is truth, no doctrine is so zealously and persistently denied, opposed, falsified, obscured, covered up, and evaporated by the spirit that always denies.... Away with the flat obfuscations of the glorious eternal nature proclaimed to us by God's Word. Let us have the courage to believe it of this dear Father when he tells us something of how good we shall once have it with him. Away with the damned whispers of the devil that these are just images, allegories, sayings. This eternal and almighty God of truth is not a poor and wretched windy words –and phrase-maker, like me and you. Let us believe him on his word of honor! And if it does not fit ten times into our still so clever theories and moral –religious concepts and imagination (p.369, 370)."

Further, the apostle testifies that this groaning creature is in labor pains until now. Labor pains are painful. But they are the indispensable passage to new life. We already know this from this old creation. So there is the assurance of a completely new being and life already in the expression chosen here. Let us let the brave Bettex speak about it again: "What shall it give birth to? The new heavens and the new earth. Why does the earth restlessly circle around the sun, returns again and again to the vicinity of the sun, draws new strength there and tirelessly begins new circulation? Why does the wave roll monotonously for millennia on the beach the millions of pebbles up and down, and grinds them smooth and round in laborious Sisyphus work? And the rivers strive without rest to the sea, and winds and clouds circle eternally around the world? All things labor: no man is able to utter it! (Eccl. 1, 8). How every year, as on the third day of creation, the earth labors, with touching faithfulness, to bring forth grass, and trees that bear their seed by themselves, and ever labors to bring forth good, everlasting fruit: and do frosts and the host of the destroyer ever spoil it, or does drought sink it, or does the worm of destruction eat it in the germ, so it tries again and again, and drives and drives to fruit in the sunlight as a revelation of its fruitfulness.... Or do you think that this tremendous, incomprehensible, all creatures crushing work and burden of existence is in vain and futile? Do you think that the fixed stars in the sky and the atoms in the water drop, the planets in their orbits and the people behind the plow are struggling for nothing and nothing again, and only so that this deception of earthly life and this most miserable of all existence continues to spin through the millennia? Then, however, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall be dead (pp. 377,

⁶ I.e. from the inside, or the essence

378 op. cit.)." Thus, in the groaning of creation in travail, the ear open to faith clearly hears the voice of Him who said, "Behold I make all things new!"

But we continue to listen:

And not only they, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also sighingly await the sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

So intimate is the togetherness of the redeemed children of God with the groaning creature. What is true of them is also true of us to the same extent. So we are not only faced with theoretical knowledge that would have a mere academic interest for us, our hope, our longing begotten and guaranteed by the Spirit itself coincides with theirs. We are infinitely higher than them, since we have the first fruits of the same Spirit of God, through whom we say Abba, Father, and through whom we know what is given to us by God, since He searches all things, even the depths of God. This is not true of the lower creature. The words of the apostle leave no doubt about this. But this so much higher and more exalted position does not release us from our deep liability and community of interest, does not allow us to think away from it in a selfish way and to eliminate it from our divine thoughts.

What is the special meaning of the first fruits of the spirit, as the apostle expresses it? Bright light falls on this from words like 2. Cor. 5, 5: "But God has prepared us for this very purpose (namely, to qualify for the transformation or covering of our mortal body with incorruption) by giving us the Spirit as a pledge. And another scripture says of the same Spirit of promise that He is the pledge, that is, the guarantee, the warranty of our inheritance until the redemption of ownership (Eph. 1:14). Again the apostle warns us: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4, 30). Rich testimony to the fact that the Holy Spirit sees it as his special task and undertakes to give us the greatest conceivable assurance, or rather to be himself, for the future glorification even of our frail, mortal and corruptible corporeality. And this is the area in which our intimate kinship with the rest of creation is so obvious and undeniable. All our pride of reason does not help us here, as certainly as the creature originates from the earth, so certainly do we. And our whole nutrition and preservation according to divine order and determination exactly the same with that of the remaining creature, only with the difference that we take our food mostly cooked or baked to us what the animal world does not do from itself. But it is immensely important and valuable for us to understand that the Holy Spirit never places Himself in irreconcilable opposition with the material creation in Scripture, as the twisted human philosophy believes it must do out of consideration for proud human reason. It alone is responsible for the deep-rooted aversion of innumerable living children of God to believe at all in a bodily revival of our very corporeality so closely related to the animal one. Bettex again speaks from his soul: "Because the human heart is a defiant and despondent thing that doubts a thousand times until it believes once, the risen Christ had to give us visible, tangible and palpable proof of the absolute reality of the heavenly life and the resurrection body. There he stands before the frightened disciples, speaks with his well-known voice: Touch me, a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see that I have. Lets them put their finger in his wounds, has spicy brown Palestine honey and ordinary fried fish brought, sits down and eats in front of the astonished onlookers..... What more shall we say? – This is not how we would have imagined the Risen Lord, but any poet would have presented a tall, ethereal figure woven of rays of light, wanting nothing more of earthly food! But Peter recognizes and emphasizes the tremendous importance of this fact and says: We ate and drank with him after he had risen from the dead (Acts 10:41).... What inconsistency, what folly, to pretend on the one hand to believe in this flesh and bone risen, eating and drinking Christ, and then to take the whole heavenly nature as mere allegories and symbols! Shall this mighty Savior and Brother and we, who will also one day rise with flesh and bones like Him, dwell forever in castles in the air, clothe ourselves in concepts, sit down on mere allegories, and eat and drink only pious sentiments! That be far off!" (see above page 415, 416).

We do not expect the final redemption of all and every material corporeality, which is philosophically presented as the highest happiness and the only true liberation of the sublime human spirit, but the miraculous liberation also of our frail corporeality, which is related to and descended from dust, from all sickness, weakness, infirmity and mortality. This is the crowning act, the highest summit of divine redemption in Christ Jesus. This mortal will put on immortality and this corruptible will put on incorruption, so it is written and so it will happen. The scripture cannot be broken.

And this is what the apostle calls our sonship. How John so beautifully and aptly contrasts this: Beloved, we are now God's children, and has not yet appeared what we shall be. But we know when He will appear that we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is. The certainty, the testimony of our sonship, is present possession of every believer, of which the world, with all its morality and religiosity, knows and understands nothing. But we have such treasure in earthen vessels. And while we are in this hut, we long and are weighed down. Therefore, we also sighingly await the public investiture, accomplished in the presence of the whole heavenly world, into our real dignity and authority as the image of the firstborn among many brethren. This will happen on that day when Christ will be revealed in glory and we with him. And to that day goes the groaning and longing of the whole creature.

"For in hope we have been saved."

Or, as Peter puts it: Born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, unfading, and undefiled, which is kept in heaven. And this is hope that will never be put to shame, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (1 Pet 1:3; Rom 5:5). This is the great implication of the living hope for all God's saved children, that our lives will not be exhausted in present experiences, however delicious, but will be wholly attuned and predisposed to the great, glorious purposes of our God and Savior on His day when He will transfigure our vain bodies into conformity with the body of His glory, according to the "effect" with which He is able to subdue the universe (Phil. 3:21). The goals of our spiritual renewal, then, are now and never on the ground of this visible creation. For a hope that is seen is no longer such a hope. This should be remembered by all who call it the highest goal of true, spiritual life to create real kingdom conditions here in this visible perishable creation and to realize the promised kingdom of the Anointed One. This goes to the lifeblood of the actual biblical hope.

"But if we hope for that which we do not see, let us wait for it in patience."

This is what the Scriptures testify to our father Abraham, that he dwelt by faith in tents as a stranger in the Promised Land, having learned to wait for the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Christians are people who can wait, someone rightly said. People who do not look at the visible, but at the invisible. They do not think that the kingdom of God will come with statistical results⁷, with –religious-political changes of the time conditions on earth in this world course, with social and economic progress, but they suffer from the more and more obvious inner and outer apostasy of Christianity from the simplicity of the gospel, with the increasing alienation from God of the coarsest as well as the most educated circles, with the revival of the grossest paganism in mammonism, superstition, spiritism, theosophy and other doctrines of the demons, can quietly wait until the hours are found when our God and Father will hand over the promised kingdom to the Son under the whole heaven and when all the ends of the world will see the salvation of our God, when he will have converted Zion to himself.

It is not made easy for us to exercise this patience and to keep ourselves chaste therein from all unsober, rash striving to bring the world even now to a life of peace and unclouded prosperity. It

⁷ S.a. Luk 17,20,21; –19,11

has no right, neither to the one, nor to the other. Its part is, first of all, unsparing, just judgment to the breaking and shattering of all the proud height that has risen up against the Son of Man, even under the garb of the most zealous promotion of the so-called "Kingdom of God on earth," out of which a system of human endeavor has been made, without the returning Lord, to bring the world to the true height of perfection.

Let us learn true, quiet, sober waiting, which is compatible with fervent love for the lost and with faithful care of the entrusted pound in the service of the waiting community. We know that our work is not in vain in the Lord, whether or not it is understood in the world, even in the pious, ecclesiastical world. Our praise is not with men, but with God.

Verse 26-27

Rom. 8, 26, 27: "Likewise also the Spirit comes to the aid of our infirmities. For we know not what we ought to pray for, as it is fitting; but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with unspoken sighs. But he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit: for he representeth the saints according to the manner that is right in the sight of God."

This is a very comforting lesson and a wonderful insight into the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We are all painfully aware of the great weakness mentioned by the apostle. For all our knowledge and our prophesying is piecemeal. Our vision, with all the desired sincerity and honesty, is limited. We do not know from one day to the next what might happen that would like to give our thoughts, hopes and desires a completely different turn or direction. Our field of vision is very limited, even if our spiritual education and our cognition is still so extensive according to human judgment. A hundred things for us and our loved ones, whose affairs we bring before God in earnest prayer, do not seem to us in any way desirable or useful, even if we are inspired by the best spiritual motives, and afterwards it turns out quite clearly that precisely what we had not at all estimated was the very best and most salvific, the God-willed.

The biblical example of King David is a very striking and valuable one in this field. He certainly had the purest intention in his heart to only honor his great, faithful God when he undertook to build a worthy temple to the same. For this purpose he did what is highly recommended in similar cases, he submitted the matter to a proven man of God, the prophet Nathan, who did not hesitate for a moment to encourage him in his pious intention. It also appears from the further course of the matter that the plan to erect a suitable sanctuary for Jehovah in Jerusalem had in itself the fullest approval of the Lord Himself. No doubt, God was pleased with David's pious undertaking. And yet, his God denied him the fulfillment of this pious desire, which was in itself godly and willed. Nor could anyone, neither King David, nor his friend and advisor, the prophet Nathan, have made the slightest reproach that they had failed or missed it in any point, as far as their recognition or judgment was concerned. All the conditions for an answer to this prayer, which was certainly to be hoped for, were present, as far as we can judge. And yet! The man of God has to go back to the king by express order and proclaim to him, you shall not build a house for my name! For the pious king certainly no small disappointment.

Only very recently I experienced something similar. I was able to pray with the greatest frankness and confidence for the complete restoration of a dear sister in a particularly serious case that was hopeless by human standards. Rarely or never have I been able to pray with such deep joy for a specific answer. But the dear sick woman died. I was completely protected from questions or even doubts or disappointment of any kind. But I still do not know the answer to a possible why. In this case, the saying "You do not know what I am doing now, but you will find out later" is true. There are probably many such cases.

One thing, however, may and must be said here and must be taken into account. The apostle's statement "we do not know what we should pray for as it is proper" must not be understood in an unrestricted sense. For the Holy Spirit has given us in the Word of God very definite and clear guidelines for many objects of our intercession and prayer, on which our praying may and must move. Whereby we have the guarantee that such praying is certainly in accordance with God and pleasing to Him. However, there is again no guarantee that we will experience the hearing or fulfillment of our Godly requests in all circumstances in our days. I mean, a child of God may and should pray under all circumstances, for example, for the conversion of his loved ones and other people whom God has brought close to him in a special way or laid on his heart. Also, prayer and intercession on biblical lines, i.e. according to biblical congregational prayers, as Eph. 1, 15, ff and –3, 14, ff are recommended to us by the Holy Spirit Himself, are godly and pleasing under all circumstances. No less also such as Is. 62, 6, 7 for the soon redemption of the chosen and today still blinded people of Israel. Likewise, admonitions are to be heeded, such as Rom. 1, 10; –10, 1; –15, 30; 2 Cor. 1, 11; Eph. 6, 18, 19; Col. 1, 9, ff; –4, 3; 2 Thes. 3, 1, 2; and more. So there are wide areas open for an active prayer life on undoubtedly fruitful and profitable lines, without invalidating or invalidating what Paul emphasizes here through the Spirit about our weakness.

And how does the Holy Spirit who dwells in us come to the aid of this natural weakness of ours? Not by giving us supernatural enlightenment and insight into the hidden counsel and will of our God and Father, as many of God's children not only desire but even claim to have attained. Often enough, believers approach us with the demand to join them in certain things, questions and undertakings, because they would certainly be "guided" by the Spirit of God in them and would certainly have known the will of the Lord. Such impositions are to be met with the greatest caution and restraint, the more the supposed certainty of the "guidance of the Spirit" is emphasized. (Compare what was said about v14 on the subject of the Spirit's guidance.) No, the Holy Spirit does not abolish our weakness, but rather leaves it undiminished, but frees us entirely from any inner sorrow or dejection that might befall us because of it, as to the hearableness and godliness of our prayers. He intercedes for us, as Paul expresses it, with unspoken sighs. So he does not even make the attempt, which surely lies in his ability, to put the right words, i.e. the right version for our requests into our mouths. We are neither specially enlightened nor even inspired by him to the right formulation of our requests, but we are represented in the most effective way.

This is a substitution that cannot be overstated and is a worthy counterpart to the one John speaks of in the case that we let ourselves be enticed and seduced into sin. Then we have above, in the upper sanctuary, an intercessor with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who immediately, by virtue of his high priestly office, intercedes for the missing and sinful brothers, without any special request and effort on our part. And just as the Just One (who is not called the Gracious and Merciful One here) intercedes without further ado for the children of His Father and ours, likewise there is no need on our part for a special appeal to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, that He may wait upon us with His blessed ministry in our weak prayers. This belongs to the inalienable and self-evident primal rights of a true child of God, with which we are called to reckon without further ado.

Nor do we need to know what the mind of the Spirit is, but it is sufficient that the heart-communicator knows, who represents the saints in a way that is appropriate and pleasing to God. Therein lies the sure guarantee that even our unfulfillable prayers and requests are not done in vain; only everything is eliminated by the omniscient Holy Spirit that is not appropriate to God, i.e. not in fullest accordance with His holy and perfect counsel of love and –will. And in the deepest reason a child of God cannot and must not desire anything else than what the Son desired: *Thy will be done!* And this is achieved with infallible certainty. And no one can say that this is something small, since our prayers were not answered according to our desire! There can be no higher honor and distinction than that our great Father honors us for having cooperated, under all circumstances, in the

execution of His holy and glorious will of love through our prayer and supplication according to God's will. And this is done in this wonderful way through the agency of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. To Him be thanksgiving and adoration for this!

Verse 28-30

V. 28– 30: "But we know that to those who love God all things work together for good (best), to those who are called according to purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he did call, them he also justified; and whom he did justify, them he also glorified."

Again a delicious main piece of Christian assurance of faith, which is worthy to stand beside the one just discussed. It is worth the effort to mark especially in our Bibles how often the word occurs: "We know", or "but this you shall know", or "about this I will not leave you in ignorance" etc.. It is not a small number of them and their content is of an enormous abundance and extension. All proud human knowledge shrinks beside it to quite inferior little sticks. Oh, that we would let it be said to us and take it to heart. This also belongs to the high nobility of our sonship in Christ Jesus.

What is said here alone can hardly be surveyed by us. It includes all areas of earthly, supernatural and subterranean events. It does not mean that my dear, own, pious self lies in the center of all God's activity and work, but that the completion of the congregation of the saints, the body of Christ, his own fullness, forms this center and at the same time the goal. And this is due to Him, through whom and to whom all things are, and who bears all things with the word of His power and directs all things according to the counsel of His holy and perfect will of love. When the whole greatness and scope of the meaning of the church, as the body of Christ, has dawned upon us, then we also find it quite natural, i.e. in accordance with God. It cannot be thought of in any other way. But we have to be careful not to apply the standard of our own personal life of salvation as the all-determining norm. The doctrinal explanations of the apostle about foreknowledge, predetermination, calling, justification and glorification, which are attached to this great basic position, also want to protect us from this. All of these direct our gaze and attention completely away from ourselves, up and over to the great glorious Caller. In this way, however, we lose nothing of comfort, of deep, indescribable joy, of triumphant sublimity over all events. That remains unabated for us. Yes, it is increased immeasurably when our gaze does not remain fixed on ourselves, but only takes in **His** inexpressible greatness and glory and lets it shine into us.

So first, all things work together. There stands before us the all things comprehensive, uniform plan and counsel of our great savior God. There every blind coincidence, every so-called fate is excluded. Nothing, not even the smallest thing, is placed here outside of the purposeful action of God, dictated by perfect wisdom, power and love. Not the sparrow that falls from the roof, not the hair of my head is uncoun ted, forgotten, overlooked.

All imaginable possibilities, combinations, plots, revolts, enmities, gatherings in the heavens, on earth or in the most eerie depths and reasons are included. The unforeseen can never happen. Everything is foreseen and precisely included in the whole calculation. There can therefore never be any question of a failure or thwarting of the divine plans.

This is a worldview of which no human and philosophical system has ever known anything. Only children of God know this, whom the spirit of truth guides into the whole glorious truth, since he investigates all things, also the depths of God and his wonderful counsels. It is not that we can now intellectually recognize or fathom how our God accomplishes this, that is not our business at all. But we may rest absolutely in this royal certainty, which is our child's part.

And further, all things work together for the absolute good, or the best. Not at our discretion, but, what is much better, after God, the only good, has considered and recognized it. Many things, as they come to us, may often enough seem different from serving our best, but that is why they are, as the Scriptures here assure us in the most complete way. This is once again something that we have to believe in our great God, without looking and understanding. And our God may also expect such faith from us in view of what the apostle now further elaborates when he speaks of those who love God and who are called according to purpose. For it is written that the love of God (and thus that to God) is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. And again, in this is love, not that **we have loved God**, but that **God** has loved **us**. But we love Him because He first loved us. For God is love and glorifies his love toward us in that while we were still sinners and enemies, Christ died for us.

And from this unfathomable and inexhaustible love the purpose was born before the eternities, according to which we have received the wonderful calling of which we are speaking here. That it is not at all a question of our destiny to eternal life or salvation must be obvious to every impartial reader of the Scriptures. Not a syllable is said about this. For God wants **all** men to be saved and all flesh to see the salvation of God and come to the knowledge of the truth. These honest statements of our truthful God must not be interpreted or doubted.

With the greatest clarity, however, the counsel of our God and Father in Christ lies openly before us here, to have his beloved only begotten Son prepared by the Holy Spirit from all the peoples of this present course of the world a chosen band of equal, full-fledged brothers, begotten of the same spirit of sonship, who are to constitute the actual "fullness" and glory of the Son on the day of his revelation and ascension to the throne. These are predestined to be conformed to the image of Him who is the radiance of His own divine being and the perfect expression of His glory. They are therefore to serve in a quite outstanding way that the Son may reach the measure of his full growth, so that he then, equipped with such corresponding organs, may glorify the Father in the still coming ages in the execution of all that God has spoken of through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. There it is then a matter of the final solution of all the great tasks and problems encompassing heaven and earth, it is a matter of bringing the whole created universe under Him, the head over the universe, it is a matter of the actual reconciliation of all God's creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth with all previous ways and decrees of the almighty God and Creator, it is a matter of the complete elimination of all enmity, all resistance in the whole wide creation, it is a matter of the achievement of the simple, sublime goal, as Paul summarizes it 1. Cor. 15:28: "that God may be all in all.

When we read in verse 30: *"And whom He predestined, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified,"*— then we are far from any anxious and constricting thought, as if these called, justified and glorified ones were the only ones saved or redeemed, and all the rest were doomed to damnation or reprobation. Such a conception is only an outgrowth of human, morbid and perverted logic and intellectual artifice, only a distortion of the precious divine truth of the calling and election to sonship, which either one has not understood nor recognized at all, or which one has unjustifiably confused with the all-embracing divine salvation instruction, which applies to all men without exception. Of course, it is not general human salvation, not God's thought with the broad masses of mankind, that is here in question, but only the special body composed of believers of all nations of the present age, and which stands in a very special, exquisite relation of life—and being to the Son of God, whose body and fullness it is called and ordained to constitute. From this it is explained that calling, justification and glorification are all already legally accomplished facts, set and given with the great, fundamental act of Golgotha, and with the raising of the head from the dead. So that with it every human boast or ability is withdrawn

from the outset every ground. With the one sacrifice He has perfected in eternity all who are sanctified, i.e. destined and prepared for such wonderful service and participation in His day.

Verse 31 –34: "What shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who spared not even his own Son, but gave him up for us all! How should he not give us all things with him? Who will bring charges against God's elect? God who justifies them? Who wants to condemn? Christ, who died, yea rather, who also is raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who also represents us?"

With these words, the apostle very boldly draws the final conclusion from his previous remarks. And he does this with the same confident certainty of faith with which he drew the irrefutable conclusion in verse 17: "But if we are children, then heirs, namely heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. This is not proud self-conceit or presumption, these are not the words of a delusional fanatic or fantasist, whose pathologically excited brain makes him believe the wildest dreams. He speaks true and reasonable words, which leave all boldest human thinking far behind. As the Scripture also declares: "What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and what has not entered the heart of man, God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us through his Spirit, who searches all things, even the depths of God. Whoever, like our apostle, stands with both feet unshakably firm on the great promises of the faithful and true God, does not become dizzy in the least. For he must and will say to himself that these bold conclusions of the spirit-filled witness of Jesus Christ are quite in accordance with God. I.e. they fully correspond to his character and nature, his wonderful eternal love counsel and purpose. For if our true, genuine sonship is correct, then nothing less can be deduced from it than what fully corresponds to the dignity and majesty, the power and majesty of the only begotten of the Father, unless one wants to accuse God of exuberance and exaggeration.

There is a delicious tone of challenge throughout this series of questions that now follows. *Is God for us, who may be against us?* With this, the simple faith in the almighty God in Christ calls into question every conceivable association or grouping of hostile powers. No individual being, no mass of creatures, no matter how great, of the mightiest form or shape, power or wisdom, can harm the weakest and least of God's children, whose life is hidden and secured with Christ in God. As an enlightened man of God has expressed it, "God and I always have the majority!"

But the actual calling does not even happen directly into the divine omnipotence, which only forms the silent background. Rather, the apostle appeals to the fact that God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, and just thereby made himself and all his fullness of power liable, for the final execution of all his thoughts and promises, resolved and given in the Son. At that point God has irrevocably given Himself wholly and forever into our hands. Therefore, every true request in Jesus' name is infallibly certain of its answer. Every promise of God in Jesus' yes and amen. God can rather deny himself than refuse something to the Son, in whom all his fullness dwells bodily. With the deed on Golgotha, the Son has indissolubly bound the Father to Himself and His own, and the Father, just as indissolubly, has made Himself eternally one with all the interests of His holy child Jesus, whom He has also appointed heir over the universe.

How could he not give us everything with him? God never does His things by halves. So our apostle also concludes 1 Cor. 3:21, 22: All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, whether Cephas or the world, whether life or death, whether things present or things to come, –all things are yours: for you are Christ's, but Christ is God's. And he introduces his letter to the Ephesians with the hymn of praise: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly regions through Christ (Eph. 1:3). If only we children of the living God would always lead ourselves accordingly in the obedience of faith and also live to the full, as it is our Father's declared will and good pleasure, instead of being satisfied with such scanty and meager nourishment and inner equipment, which just barely keeps us alive and protects us from the grossest sinning, but whereby there is almost no talk of real victoriousness and of abundant fruitfulness

for our God and His cause. For by this we do not advertise our glorious Lord very effectively, that we make the impression on those around us as if we were kept quite short by Him on the whole, and had to struggle along with great difficulty and under much pressure. But little of overflowing joy and victoriousness is apparent to us.

Who will bring charges against God's elect? (God himself, who justifies them?) How significant it is again that the apostle does not even mention the well-known accuser of the saints. All possible and conceivable accusations of Satan are of no importance as long as God himself does not find reason and cause for accusation against his own. But that he should do this is for Paul a quite incomprehensible thought, a monstrosity. For how can the same God, to whom alone we owe our justification on the basis of His perfect righteousness in the offering of His Son to atone for the sins of the whole world, then still be our accuser? After all, He made Him who knew not of sin to be sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). If the children of God also wanted to draw the right conclusions from this unambiguous word of the apostle, and to meet the tempter and adversary on this ground in faith with determination, who still wants to frighten us with the fact that God's holiness and righteousness is opposed to us in all circumstances. However, exactly the opposite is the case, they are definitely on our side, they are vouched for and stand firm for our complete justification. And on the sole condition that we never deny, gloss over or excuse our sin or sins, but freely confess that we have sin or have actually sinned (1 John 1:8 –2:1), we are guaranteed immediate cleansing. After all, in Christ we stand on a completely new legal ground, i.e. not that of our own righteousness from the law, but that of His perfected righteousness, which is and remains ours through faith alone.

Who wants to condemn? Is it Christ who died, or rather, who was also raised from the dead, who also sits at the right hand of God, who also represents us? It is the same weapon that the apostle uses also further to prevent any height that wants to rise against the divine procedure in the justification and glorification of lost sinners, who are and must remain completely without any merit. The entirely new legal position created by Calvary is so established and secured that there can be no condemnation par excellence for those who are in Christ Jesus, as he expressed it in the magnificent proclamation in the first verse of this chapter. It is quite inconceivable that the Christ in whom God was and reconciled the world to Himself, and to whom the Father handed over all judgment because He became the Son of Man, should pronounce the sentence of condemnation or even have it executed on those whom He so dearly purchased and redeemed with His own blood. It should be noted here that the apostle lists separately all three great facts, which form a complete unity, namely that of his death, his resurrection and his triumphant ascension to the right hand of the Father. This gives special weight to his argument, and prompts us to consider and appreciate each individual act of God in Christ according to its special affirming significance for the consolidation of the whole edifice of our glorious sonship in him. For it was only by being raised from the dead that Christ was powerfully, i.e. legally, proven and legitimized as the real, true, empowered Son of the living God (Rom. 1:4). Thereby the Father "sealed" Him and confirmed His unlimited authority over all flesh (Joh. 17,2), according to which He can now give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him. By sitting at the right hand of the Father in obedience of faith in the word of promise (Ps. 110,1), He took over the all-encompassing executive power high above every principality, authority, power and dominion in heaven and on earth and is now the caretaker and administrator of the heavenly goods, gifts and powers, the great center from which His own fullness of life can now flow through and fill all believing members of His body to the fullness of God.

Verse 35 –39: Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation or fear or persecution or hunger or nakedness or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are slain all the day long; we are esteemed as sheep for the slaughter!" But in all this we overcome far through him who loved us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things

present, nor things to come, nor things high, nor things low, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

This is the triumphant final chord of the glorious Song of Sonship. This bows deep into the dust for worship and at the same time fills the heart with exultation and rejoicing over such a proclamation to poor, dust-born, sinful human children who have nothing, but also nothing at all to boast about or to show for. They know that they are saved by grace alone, that they are called with such a high, heavenly call into the fellowship of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Who can only marvel and ask: What is man that you should remember him, the Son of man, that you should thus take care of him?

There they all stand before us in line, all the sufferings of the present time, which our apostle already in verse 18 did not consider worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. Why sons of God, loved and so highly esteemed by their Father, have to suffer so much because of their position in and to Christ? And let us be clear about this, there— is no mention of any other suffering than that endured for the sake of Christ. All self-inflicted or general human sufferings and— tribulations are not even considered here. But there is only one answer to this question: Did not Christ have to suffer such things and (thus) enter into his glory? There is no other way to glory than via Golgotha. Therefore Paul desires to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and that He might become like His death (Phil. 3,10).

But in all this we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For we boast even of tribulations! We do not only endure, we do not only overcome, by accepting them, like everything else, with thanksgiving and never letting them get us down or depress us, but we recognize in them divine, i.e. perfectly wise and effective means of probation—and purification for inner maturity and shaping into the image of Christ. But only through Him who loved us. Just as Paul was able to do everything through Him who makes us powerful.

And in view of the omnipotence and overflowing fullness of love with which he loves and lifts and carries us out of our depths of misery to the heights of his own glory, his adoring spirit soars up to a unique expression of his certain conviction that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities nor powers (in heavenly realms), neither the present nor the future (in all historical becoming and coming into being in the present or in the following ages), neither the high nor the low (in the life of the spirit—, the mind —or the soul), nor any other creature (with whose number and kind and efficiency we are known only to a very limited extent); we know e.g. For example, we are far from knowing all the inhabitants of our ocean depths) is —able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord! We are his, —dearly bought. To Him we live, suffer, die. He alone is our exceedingly glorious Master, our exalted Head. Him we await from heaven, to be united with Him eternally into "One Body" and to be at His free disposal, for the fulfillment of all that the Father promised Him and that He expects from the Son in the fullness of time. Worship the Lord!