

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Lecture 10, Romans 8:23-9:16

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 10 on Romans 8:23-9:16.

We've been looking at Romans chapter 8 and how the Spirit of God acts within our lives.

In fact, Romans 7 is a chapter, it's pretty introspective. I, me, my, mine. Chapter of defeat.

It's a chapter of flesh. Romans 8 mentions the Holy Spirit more than any other chapter in the Bible. It's a chapter of being more than conquerors, a chapter of overwhelming victory for those who are in the Spirit as opposed to those who are in the flesh.

That is, those who have God's Spirit working in them rather than simply being dependent on themselves. Well, we left off the last session talking about groaning and what that meant in the context of Romans 8, but also it evokes the book of Exodus. So, at this point, I want to talk about the new Exodus in Romans 8 because it appears at a number of points.

Now, I learned a lot of these things from my mentor, Benny Aker, at the undergraduate level many years ago, but others have developed this to a great extent further than what we have done in the past. But I think it's clear there are so many illusions, compounded illusions here. The prophets spoke of a new Exodus.

You have it in Hosea chapter 2, I'll lure you into the wilderness and betroth you to myself as I did in the wilderness. And Hosea chapter 11, well, when Israel was young, I loved him. Out of Egypt, I called my son and I bent down and lovingly fed them, but they didn't listen.

And so, I'm going to send them away again, only this time, not Egypt, but Assyria will be their king. But then God's voice breaks with brokenhearted love and says, O, Ephraim, how can I do this to you? How can I make you like the cities of the plain that I destroyed? They overturned in my anger and upon which I kindle the fire. Instead, my own heart is overturned within me and all my compassions are, my own heart is overturned with me.

All my compassions are kindled and I will call and my sons will come trembling from the West. They will come trembling like birds from the land of Assyria, like doves from the land of Egypt. And they will again be my people.

He speaks of a new Exodus where he brings his people back to the land. You have that in Isaiah chapter 11. You have this highway coming back to Zion and the messengers announcing that which we'll see later on in Romans.

And Isaiah chapter 40 in verse three, prepare a highway in the wilderness for our God, which is applied to John the Baptist in all four gospels. The command community applied it to itself. They were expecting a new Exodus.

This new Exodus continued to be expected in early Judaism. Well, in Romans eight, he speaks of how we are led by the spirit, just as Israel was led in the wilderness by the pillar of fire and the cloud. It speaks of the adoption of God as God's children, chapter eight, verses 14 through 16.

And again, in verse 23, the fullness of that, the redemption of our body, our inheritance, just as Israel was looking forward to their inheritance in the promised land, 8:17. It speaks of groaning because of bondage. In Exodus chapter two, verses 23 and 24, it says Israel sighed because of their bondage and that God heard their sighs. And it's the same.

Well, it's the cognate Greek wording here where they were groaning and God heard their groans because of their bondage. And so here we groan because our body is still under slavery to corruption in this world. Well, corruption in the sense of flora as it was used sometimes in Greek sources for just something like entropy, you know, things wind down, the bodies decompose, and so on.

We're groaning to be released from that bondage to perishability until we become imperishable, to borrow language from elsewhere in Paul, and looking forward to the redemption of our body. Again, that can be Exodus language, Romans 8.23. But we haven't completed the experience yet. Many of the early church fathers like Justin, especially when he's dialoguing with Trypho, many of the church fathers and Barnabas, and others, Pseudo Barnabas, many of the church fathers were at pains to explain how there had to be a first coming and a second coming.

You know, they'd look at the two goats in Leviticus 16 and so on. But I think Paul also has it here because God's people were led out of Egypt. But then there was an interim period while they were in the wilderness before they came into the promised land.

Their redemption happened in two stages. And for Paul also it happens in two stages. It's the already, not yet.

Chapter 8:23, Paul says we have the first fruits of the Spirit, apartheid, which means something very similar to when he speaks of the down payment of the Spirit. The first fruits were not just a promise of the future harvest. It was the actual beginning of the harvest, the first part of the harvest that would be offered to the Lord.

So, when he speaks of us having the first fruits of the Spirit, we have a foretaste of the future world. It doesn't mean we don't suffer in this world. We're still awaiting the redemption of our bodies, but it means God is at work in us in a dramatic way.

So much so, we see this so often in the New Testament that it can be like the idea that the world should be able to look at us, the way we treat one another, the way we worship God, the way we live in covenant relationship with one another. The world should be able to look at us and imagine a foretaste of what heaven or the future world will be like. Paul uses this elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 15:20, when he speaks of Christ as the first fruits of the resurrection from the dead.

Someday the dead will be raised all together, at least all the righteous together. And then we have a foretaste of that in Jesus. That's why the Sadducees, didn't persecute the Pharisees for believing in the resurrection, but in Acts 4, verse 2, I believe it is, it says that they arrested the apostles Peter and John because they were preaching in Jesus the resurrection from the dead, not merely as a theoretical hope for the future, but as something that has invaded history already, to use language borrowed from George Ladd and developed by Gordon Fee and a lot of others.

So, the first fruits of the Spirit, thinking in terms of the future breaking into the present. You have that idea elsewhere. You have it elsewhere in Romans, like in Romans 12.2, where he speaks of not being conformed literally to this age, but being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

You have it elsewhere in Paul, Galatians 1.4, Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age. You have it beyond Paul, Hebrews chapter 6, where it says that we've tasted of the Holy Spirit and we've also tasted of the powers of the age to come. But especially in terms of the Spirit as a foretaste, we've talked about this, the ahabon, the down payment, 2 Corinthians 1:5 and Ephesians 1, and also 1 Corinthians 2 that we've talked about.

Eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard, but God has revealed these things to us by his Spirit. Well, we have the already, not yet. We have the foretaste of the future.

And we see more of this foretaste in chapter 8, verse 27, where Paul speaks of the one who searches the hearts and the minds. We know who that is from the Psalms and Jeremiah. We know it from the Old Testament.

In fact, we use that as a title for God, the searcher of hearts and minds. It says that he knows the mind of the Spirit. So, the Spirit is in us.

The Spirit intercedes for us according to God. What that means then is that God knows what we need before we ask him. And the Spirit within us will present these needs to God.

The Spirit is not the only one interceding for us. The Spirit is within us interceding for us. In verse 34, we'll see that Christ intercedes for us before God's throne.

So, we're taken care of. I mean, talk about prayer support. I do recruit prayer support.

I have some really close friends who I know really like to pray, and I ask them to pray for me. And I keep them up on my prayer requests. But we really have the best prayer support possible that goes even beyond any other people praying for us.

We have the Spirit himself within us, and the Spirit within them, of course, also offering prayers to God. And actually, yes, if they're praying for me and the Spirit is within them, that's great, too. But even if you're out somewhere and you're sharing the gospel in a completely isolated area, Paul did that only under duress.

He did it in Athens. He usually had somebody with him. But you've just got a small team there.

You're surrounded by people who don't know about Jesus and don't understand about Jesus. It's a completely different framework of thinking. The Spirit of God is still within you to offer intercession, and God is still at work even in a setting like that.

Chapter 8, verse 28, we see that the Spirit is interceding within us. God is at work in our lives. God works all things for good.

It's not just the textual variant. It's probably not just all things work for good. But however you take the textual variant, the idea is that God is the one who does this.

God works things for good. It's like Joseph said to his brothers, well, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God worked it in such a way that it brought about deliverance for the whole family, and it brought about deliverance for the people of Egypt for the people of Canaan, and for others.

When judgment comes later in history, in the Exodus and the conquest, well, the prosperity that's being pulled back in the plagues in Exodus was a prosperity that God had given, to begin with. And the descendants of the Canaanites in the book of

Joshua and Judges actually were descendants of people whose lives were spared earlier. And actually, in terms of God having the right to judge, all of us were created by him to begin with.

But God worked it for good. And often God works things for good in our lives in ways that we live to see. And I can testify of that.

Some of my deepest tragedies, God has worked them for good. Sometimes the way he works them for good, it's like in 2 Corinthians 1, in your own brokenness, because you've experienced God's comfort in the midst of brokenness, you're able to comfort others who are broken. We live in the same world with other people, broken people.

And we, like them, are often broken people. And it gives us a connection with them. But because we've experienced God's grace, we can share that grace with them in the midst of their brokenness.

But ultimately, and this is I think the most important thing in this context, is the long range of working all things for good. Because even if we don't live to see it in this life, I mean, God works my death for his good. Even if we don't live to see it in this life, the ultimate good, it's for the good of God's purposes in history that he's working out.

But it's also for our good because he says, we are the called according to his purpose. And he goes on to explain that more in verse 29, that we've been predestined to be conformed to the image of his son and to be glorified, as he goes on to describe what that means when we have our glorified bodies and are fully conformed to his image. I think that this has to do with suffering, especially given Paul's usage of the same kind of language in Philippians chapter 3, when Paul says that if we are sharers in Christ, we're conformed to his death, we'll also be sharers in his resurrection.

And also, elsewhere in Philippians where it speaks of our body being transformed to be like his glorious body. Romans chapter 8, verses 29 and 30. Here we have, in rhetorical terms, a chain or sororities, just like we did back in chapter 5. Whom he foreknew, those he predestined.

Whom he predestined, he called. Whom he called, he justified. Whom he justified, he glorified.

This may be viewed as a completed action. I mean, the glorification of our body hasn't happened yet, but if it's talking theologically in God's sight, it's as good as done because he already foreknew us. So, it may be viewed that way.

Some other people have said, well, the way that the verbs are working again, it's looking at the whole action from the outside. So, it's looking at it completed because

it's looking at it from the outside rather than making a theological point about it's as good as done. Now, what does it mean by that God foreknew? Some people will say that God foreknew in that he chose us, but is God's choice arbitrary or is there a reason for God's choice? Does it have anything to do with us at all? Some people will say God foreknew us because he foreknew our decision for Christ and therefore predestined us accordingly.

You have debates between Calvinists and Arminians, and I usually don't like to get into those debates. I have friends on both sides, and actually, I was taking one position with one friend who's also a biblical scholar, and I was arguing that position, and he was taking the other position, and we couldn't find anything we disagreed on because we were both biblical scholars and we both were harmonizing our views with what we found in Scripture. And finally, I said, well, you hold my view.

He said, no, you hold my view. So I don't usually argue with people about it anymore because people don't even define all these terms in exactly the same ways. But to say this, both Calvinists and Arminians believe that God has to draw a person.

We, in ourselves, do not simply accept the grace of God without being touched by God. All of us agree with that, Calvinists and Arminians. We also agree, and everybody knows we agree on this, that God is the one who has to save us.

It's his Spirit who makes us new. We also agree that a person has to persevere to the end to be saved. So, this isn't really a debate we need to get into.

There are some parts of the Bible, like Hebrews. If I were just expounding Hebrews, I would sound to you like an Arminian. If I'm just expounding Romans 8, 9, 10, and 11, I'm going to sound like a Calvinist.

I'm just trying to expound the text faithfully. I think that God is actually so much smarter than we are that the whole big picture may encompass, well, it does encompass the whole of biblical theology, and that sometimes we nitpick on details we don't need to nitpick about, and that God is so sovereign that God could sovereignly choose to give us a measure of free will and human responsibility and work out his purposes within that. God's design is so exquisite.

I mean, God didn't have to take, if you take six literal days, God didn't have to take six literal days to make the world. And if you take it as 13, 15 billion years, God didn't have to take 13, 15 billion years to make the world. I tend toward the latter view, but whatever view you take, God could have just spoken everything into existence and made it perfectly the way he wanted, right that way.

He could have made us the way that Platonic thought it was, and Origen actually thought the resurrection body would be a sphere because he said that's the perfect

shape. Sometimes when I eat too much, I'm afraid I'm going in that direction, but we had our ideas of the way things should be perfect, but God has made a creation much more exquisite than that. We do have spherical bodies in nature, but I mean, the trees and the leaves on the trees and so on, I mean, God...anyway, just I get too excited about this, and sometimes I'm tempted to preach, but I can't help it.

I get excited about the text, but I'm also trying to say that it's bigger than sometimes our imagination and scripture sometimes looks at it from the standpoint of what God knows, and sometimes it looks at it from the standpoint of human experience, and both are real. Also, some Christian philosophers have spoken about how God knows everything, but God also works within history and chooses to work with us on that level as well. So, there can be a lot of different things, but we are doing a particular passage, so please understand that I'm doing this particular passage.

I'm not negating things that might be emphasized in other passages, just emphasizing the point of this passage, and I keep qualifying things, whatever I'm talking about usually, but predestination is relevant to the context. Chapter 9, verses 11 and following, God chose Jacob before Jacob was even born. The point in the context in Romans 9, God is not obligated to choose on the basis of ethnicity.

Well, Paul's focused on this issue here. It's not so much issues of human responsibility or choice here, because that's not what he's focused on, but those may appear in other contexts. So, it's good to recognize complementary features, and when you make your whole theology, to take into account all the passages.

A lot of us are really good with certain passages, and we don't fit things together. Romans 8, verse 31, if God is for us, who can be against us? And that echoes Psalm 118, verse 6, which is part of the *halal* that was used during the Passover season, Psalms 113 through 118. The Lord is for me.

I will not fear what anyone will do to me. And in the Septuagint, it puts it a little bit differently than Hebrew. The Lord is my helper.

I will not be afraid of what anyone will do to me. In any case, he's echoing the language of the Psalms here. He just echoes Scripture throughout.

Paul was full of Scripture. The book of Revelation, which doesn't have many scriptural quotes, just echoes it all over the place. So, we can see that these authors were full of Scripture, full of God's word.

God did not spare his son, verse 32. Many people see here an echo of what's called the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, where Abraham did not spare his son, but handed him over. I don't know if that's actually echoed here, but certainly, it can give us a picture of the pain and the sacrifice of sacrificing a son.

And any of you who's a father, you can say, oh, that would have been hard. And God delivered over his son, the same language as back in chapter four, verse 25, where God delivered over his son. And again, the language of sonship, is used with regard to Jesus with intimacy and affection with the father, as well as his great role.

Well, there's an implied call of omer here. Call of omer was a Judean name for how much more arguments. It's also used by Gentiles, but Jesus often uses it when he teaches.

Well, if you being evil, give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good gifts to those who ask him, or in Luke, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him, Luke 11:13. Well here, if God didn't spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how much more will he freely give us all things? Now that doesn't mean that you can run out and say, run into a department store and say, okay, God, I want that, that, that, that, and that. That's not what it means. Probably it's as in 5:17, they will reign in life, meaning in the life of the resurrection, we will have all things someday.

We will inherit the world to come. As he said back in chapter four, and also in chapter eight, we have an inheritance waiting for us. And if he gave his son for us, who's going to stand against us? Who will accuse us? He says in few, a couple of different ways in chapter eight, verses 33 and 34.

Well, the idea of accusation, Jewish people understood Satan as an accuser. You have that with Hasatan, the adversary in Job 1 and 2, where he's accusing Job before God and then goes out and afflicts Job, whatever he can get permission to do. Zechariah chapter three, you have Satan coming before the high priest Joshua and accusing him.

And then God sends instead an angel to speak in support of Joshua. Well, Satan appears as an accuser. And that's still in the New Testament we read about in Revelation chapter 12, verse 10, where Satan is an accuser, and the accuser of the brothers and sisters is cast out of heaven.

He's cast down so he can accuse them no more. And my understanding of that in the Revelation is controversial. My understanding of Revelation 12 is that the child has been caught up to heaven.

That's Jesus caught up to heaven to rule the nations with the rod of iron before his throne. And at that point, when he's caught up to rule the nations and he is before God's throne, he's our intercessor. There's no place left for the accuser in heaven.

He can't accuse us anymore. And that's why believers were able to overcome him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony, loving not their lives to the death. Well, here, Satan can't accuse us before God.

And Jewish tradition emphasized the role of Satan as accuser, tempter, and deceiver. You already had accuser and tempter in the Old Testament, but it's elaborated in Jewish literature. And later rabbis actually said that Satan accuses us before God's throne, day and night, every day except on the Day of Atonement.

And one reason they excluded the Day of Atonement was there are 365 days in a year. And they said the numerical value of Satan's name in Hebrew is 364. So, you had to figure out what to do with the last day.

But because Jesus is our intercessor before the Father, Satan can't accuse us before the Father. He may come and try to accuse us ourselves, but he can't accuse us before the Father anymore. And so, he says, who may charge God's chosen? Well, we know from the context, the chosen, that's us.

Those are us who are in Christ. Isaiah 50, verses 8 and 9. He's echoing the language of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which goes something like this, although I'm going to skip a little bit. The one who justifies me is near.

Who judges me? And who judges me? Behold, the Lord helps me. Who will harm me? And so, we have similar language to that here in 8.33 and 34. Who can bring a charge against God's elect? It's Christ who justifies.

It's God who justifies. So, who can bring a charge against us? And here he says God is the one who justifies, just like in Isaiah 50, it is God who justifies. And it's because Christ died, he says.

Christ who died for us is also the one who intercedes for us. He pleads the case. And you can't possibly imagine that Christ, who in obedience to the Father gave his life for us, is going to lose our case before the Father.

No, when Christ intercedes for us, we don't have to worry about condemnation or guilt, as he says back in chapter 8 and verse 1. There's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Now keep in mind, again, like 1 John has this paradox balancing it with the fact that his spirit is also within us to help us to do what honors God. In antiquity, sometimes you would have people plead their own case, but often you had people who would plead the case on their behalf as intercessors, as advocates.

The Greek word for that especially is *parakletos*, *paraclete*. And you also could have, you also would have accusers. In this period, in Roman courts, you didn't always have somebody to speak for you.

But in terms of speaking against you, that's how cases were normally initiated. Under normal circumstances, somebody would charge you with something. But we have an intercessor.

We have a *parakletos* before the Father in the language of 1 John. We have an advocate with the Father. And that's also what we see here.

What does it mean for Jesus to be the high priest in the heavens after the order of Melchizedek in the language of Hebrews? Now, when I talk about background when I write things like I wrote the background commentary, I mainly focus on extra-biblical, especially extra-New Testament background for the New Testament, because I'm assuming that people understand, you know, they know the New Testament for themselves. However, when we're trying to explain the text fully, I mean, part of the background, part of the closest background, besides the theology of the Old Testament, is early Christian background, what we know Jesus taught, what we know his followers believed. That was part of the movement from which these letters emerged.

It doesn't deny that there are different emphases and different writers, but it can help us to draw on that fuller context. Since I'm doing that, I thought I'd better mention it. Acts see, that's the danger of skipping around.

I love the whole Bible. But anyway, in Romans chapter 8, verses 35 through 39, we have here a chiasmic structure. We talked about that back in chapter 2. We have it here as well.

Nothing can separate believers from Christ's love. Verse 35a, also in verse 39, nothing can separate believers from God's love in Christ. Then he has a list of sufferings in 8:35b and in 8:38 and 8:39a. And then in the middle, he gives the main point, which wasn't always true in the chiasm, but appears to be here.

Believers thoroughly overcome. Now, or it's the word *nekao* for overcome, and then it's got, it's intensified by *huper*, like we hyper-conquer, we overwhelmingly conquer. Just definitely we win.

Chapter 8, verses 35 and 36, just to look at what some of these troubles were. Some of these were troubles actually that the Roman believers had gone through. Some of them are troubles that Paul would go through, and some of these things were troubles that they were going to face.

For example, famine. Paul may be randomly listing these, but we do know that famine did strike the empire, and various parts of the empire during the years that Claudius was emperor. It affected Corinth when Paul was there, actually.

We know when he was there because he was there when Gallio was the proconsul, and Gallio was only proconsul for about a year because he got sick. It also would have affected Rome because Claudius was actually mobbed in the streets because there wasn't enough grain to go around. The Roman practice was they taxed very heavily Egypt and North Africa in terms of the grain that was produced there so that sometimes children in Egypt starved or died of malnutrition because there wasn't enough grain to go around.

But Rome ate free because there was this monthly grain dole where they gave out this grain that was being shipped there. Rome didn't actually control the fleet. It was not a merchant marine in that sense, but it was run by business people, but Rome certainly made use of that and paid well for that, especially in winter when it was dangerous to sail there.

So, there were riots in Rome whenever there wasn't enough food to go around. Rome had about a million people, the largest city in Mediterranean antiquity, and no way to support it based on just the outlying areas. They had to ship in a lot of grain and famine was therefore a perpetual concern for Rome.

If they wanted stability in the empire, they certainly wanted stability in the capital of the empire where the emperor lived and the Senate was there, and so forth. When he speaks of nakedness, the word that we translate nakedness, not only here but in other passages, nakedness doesn't always mean completely without clothing, but it does mean very poorly clothed. My wife, when she was a refugee for 18 months, toward the end of the time, I mean all her clothes were wearing out.

She just had rags. And in Egypt, from what we can tell from the papyri, the average person had just one cloak. You know, when you're washing it or sewing it back together, what are you wearing? So, a lot of people suffered from these things.

In fact, with regard to famine, some have estimated that at any given time, half of the people of the empire or over half of the people of the empire were at risk of starvation or malnutrition. Not that they did starve or die malnutrition, some did, but that if the support system had fallen through, the networks of family and friends and different ways to get food, they would have starved. One can debate the exact figures, but it was a lot of people who were very, very poor, not just fairly poor, but very, very poor.

He also speaks here of the sword. And we could think of that, although that was often a metaphor for war in the Old Testament prophets, we can think here probably

of the Jus Gladii, of which we read also in Romans 13:4, where Rome bears the right of the sword. They exercised the right of capital punishment.

So like James, the brother of John in Acts chapter 12, or like John the Baptist back in Mark 6, Rome bears the right of the sword. Rome's agents bear the right of the sword. And so even if we face death, and at this point, Paul digresses because he really wants to drive home this point about innocent sufferers in Psalm 44, verse 22.

The context of it is saying, God, what have we done? We're suffering, we're innocent. We can suffer for a lot of different reasons. Sometimes it's judgment, usually corporate judgments on societies or the world as a whole, just to get our attention, to turn us from the greater judgment of living forever without Him, which people choose.

But in this context, and often, perhaps, well, usually, when Paul is addressing believers, 1 Corinthians 11:30 seems to be an exception to that. Maybe the gifts of healings were inhibited by not rightly discerning the body of Christ among one another. But in most cases, when Paul speaks of suffering, like back in Romans chapter 5, the suffering is not a judgment on us.

We face suffering, but we face it with the assurance of God's love. At least that's the way we should face it. God loves us.

We have hope. We can go through this because we know that God is with us. And it's not saying we did something wrong to merit the suffering.

We live in a world that is perishable and is experiencing birth pangs. And in this case, especially, this sword can refer to suffering directly on behalf of Christ. Well, less than 10 years after Paul wrote this letter, there was a fire in Rome.

And you know what happens when something goes wrong. There's a catastrophe. Leaders usually get blamed.

You should have kept this from happening. And Nero does as the emperor of Rome, he needs a scapegoat. And this was after Nero was out of control, I mentioned before.

Nero, and presumably Tigellinus, decided that the Christians would make a good scapegoat. Nero's girlfriend and ultimately wife, Poppaea Sabina, had a liking for the Jewish people, Josephus tells us. And also, the Jewish people were kind of large.

Even though Claudius had expelled them from Rome, you couldn't actually blame them for the fire and start executing them. But the Christian movement was not

well-liked by many of the non-Christian Jewish people. And it was not well-liked by a lot of other people.

It was a minority movement. It was small enough that it made an easy scapegoat, an easier scapegoat than the Jewish community. So, Nero started burning Christians alive to light his imperial gardens at night, using them as torches and killing them in other ways, dressing them up as wild animals and having them killed in the arena, and so on.

According to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down. Paul was executed at that time. So less than 10 years after Paul wrote this passage, this is a life and death message that the Christians in Rome will need to have internalized.

And it's also a good warning for us. Sometimes we think, well, that can only happen to other people. It can't happen to us.

I remember many years ago, actually, it was in the mid-1980s, and I was praying and I felt like the Lord was saying that he was going to discipline the church in the United States, that he was going to judge this nation. And of course, this can be quoted out of context. Jeremiah Wright was speaking of judgment coming on the U.S. and he spoke from the left.

Pat Robertson spoke of judgment on the U.S. and he spoke from the right. And they got quoted and just ripped to shreds by their detractors. So, speaking of judgment is considered unpatriotic, just like it was in Jeremiah's day.

But I was like, why? What's going on, Lord? I don't understand this. And I felt like what he said was that we were arrogant in this nation. And I was like, how are we arrogant? I mean, the church isn't arrogant, are we? But we were arrogant in the sense that we knew about our brothers and sisters suffering in many other parts of the world.

And we were acting at the time like that can't happen to us, that won't happen to us, because we're spiritually better than they are or, you know, for whatever reasons, God is blessing us with comfort and it's going to stay that way. But I felt like what he said was that someday he's going to strip us of the things that we value so we can learn to value what really matters. And that's what happens here in this passage.

And in Romans 13 also he says, the day is at hand, the night is far spent, it's time to awake. Let's adopt God's perspective. Let's look at things from an eternal perspective.

Let's view ourselves as the body of Christ together around the world and not like, well, I'm from this country, I'm from that country. We are one body. And if one part of the body hurts, we all hurt.

And we want to do our best to serve one another. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are talking about helping the needy in Jerusalem. Anyway, I keep going off on things.

So let me come back to this passage. There was much suffering that believers already experienced. I told you about the apartment buildings and how most of the people in Rome were poor and had very poor housing.

And yet, Paul says that no matter what we go through, including all these things that he's enumerated, which he wouldn't have had to do just to Rome, he could have done it anywhere. But in all these things, we are more than conquerors. We overwhelmingly are victorious because of the one who loved us.

We know he loved us. Nothing can separate us from God's love. And that's what matters most.

That's what no one can take away from us. That's what we'll have forever. I know even with the ministry, I get wrapped up in this ministry or that ministry, and I think, you know, I've got to get this done.

I've got to get that done. And I remember one time I walked into worship, and I just felt the Spirit immediately as I walked into the worship. And I felt God assure my heart, you know, it's good that you're doing this, and it's good that you're doing this, and it's good that you are this, and it's good that you are that.

But someday you won't be all those things. But what you will always be is my child. So, we identify ourselves often by the work we do, even for the work that we do for the Lord.

And it's not wrong. Paul identifies himself that way also. But when we're with the Lord forever, whether it's Paul, whether it's you, whether it's me, what we'll always be, what we are most fundamentally, is God's children.

And nothing can separate us from God's love. Some of the other things he speaks of that can't separate us, he comes to in verses 38 and 39. In verse 38, he talks about rulers and authorities or rulers and powers.

Usually, when Paul uses that language, he's referring to humans. That's what he usually refers to, rulers and authorities. But here in verse 38, it's linked with angels.

So, I just wanted to digress and make a few comments on this. Jewish people sometimes spoke of ranks of angels. You have that in the Enoch literature and so on.

They also sometimes spoke of angels of the nations, the spiritual rulers that were behind the earthly rulers. You have that in the Septuagint translation of Deuteronomy 32:8. You have it in Daniel 10. The prince of Greece and the prince of Persia standing against Mikael, Michael, the prince of God's people, the guardian angel of Israel.

Well, standing actually against someone else. Michael actually was able to help Gabriel. But you have this idea developed further in a lot of Jewish literature and again in Enoch literature, where later rabbis spoke a lot about it.

So, what if the rulers of this world are against us? So, what if Nero Caesar is against us? Ultimately, they don't control the future. They don't hold the future in their hands. All the empires of history, of the past, now lie in the dust.

All empires, human empires will ultimately fall because we know that there's a time coming when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his anointed one, of his Messiah. So even if we're speaking of rulers and authorities in heavenly places, we don't have to worry. Christ has been exalted above them.

And we have been seated with Christ in heavenly places, Ephesians says. We don't have to be afraid of spiritual powers in the world. Now, I'm not speaking here in terms of some forms of spiritual warfare that I've observed.

Where some people are talking about, you know, they're supposed to, I went to this one prayer meeting thinking we're supposed to be praying to God, and then instead people were like addressing these heavenly powers and saying, we cast you down. By the end of the prayer meeting, the whole world should have been converted by the way they were speaking. But we don't see that.

I mean, in Daniel 10, where it actually talks about these heavenly powers, it doesn't talk about Daniel trying to cast them down. It speaks of Daniel continuing in prayer to God, and then God eventually addresses it. And Daniel's prayer was already approved by God, but Daniel finally got the message about it.

So, you know, that's the one place in the Bible that actually speaks of it in the context of prayer. We don't have biblical precedent for doing that. I mean, sometimes in the Bible you do have like Ezekiel prophesying to the mountains or something.

Sometimes you have symbolic actions where it's specifically directed by the Spirit of God. But we don't have sometimes the way people have done spiritual warfare, what

they call spiritual warfare today. And especially when, you know, people making fun of them, ridiculing them, or cursing them.

2 Peter 2, and also the book of Jude, seem to militate very strongly against that approach to spiritual warfare. We have, I mean, it's one thing in the Gospels you see people, we see Jesus in the Gospels, and you see his followers in Acts casting out demons when they're in somebody. But that's different.

That's like the ground level. It's different from, you know, for air support, we depend on God. We depend on his angels.

We're not, and also, you know, anyway. But these angels may be viewed as being behind earthly rulers. And Paul says, these can't separate us from the love of God.

Nothing, life and death itself can't separate us from the love of God. Well, after Romans 8, I'm sure your math is as good as mine. We have Romans chapter 9, Romans chapters 9 through 11.

At the beginning of Romans 9, well, Paul talked about the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit. Now he says, my conscience testifies in the Holy Spirit. Maybe as back in chapter 1, he's citing God's witness again, because he wants to make sure nobody misunderstands him.

He's talking about, you know, Gentile Christians are welcome as God's children. Gentile Christians, as well as Jewish believers, have experienced this new exodus, this new era of salvation. This isn't what the Jewish people were, most of the Jewish people hadn't embraced Paul's message.

And Paul doesn't want you to miss the point that yet where the Old Testament talks about God's love for his people and so on. God hasn't stopped caring about his people. Paul speaks of continual sorrow in his heart, in chapter 9 and verse 2. Now, how do you handle that when Philippians 4.4 talks about rejoicing the Lord always? And again, I say rejoice.

There may be an element of hyperbole in each, in that there's a time to weep and there's a time to rejoice. But Paul on a regular basis has this sorrow in his heart when he remembers his people. And he says I could wish myself accursed or separated from Christ on behalf of my people.

Now, can he be separated from Christ on behalf of his people? He's already said nothing separates us from Christ. He's just said that. So, Paul doesn't get accursed.

But the idea is very similar to Moses being willing to be destroyed for his people. God blot my name out of the Book of Life. And God says, I'll blot out of the Book of Life the people that should be blotted out.

So, he's not going to blot Moses out. But Paul here speaks kind of like Moses. But he also recognizes that just as God is going to say later in the passage, or Paul is also going to say later in the passage, quoting the book of Exodus, God says, I will have compassion on whom I have compassion, which includes Moses.

He's speaking to Moses in that passage. Chapter 9, verses 4 and 5. We have here Paul's description. He comes back to the idea back in chapter 3, where he asks, what advantage is there in being Jewish ethnically? And Paul's going to describe that more fully here in verses 4 and 5. He gives a series of feminine nouns with a repetition of endings.

This is so that if you're listening to it in Greek, this is like, whoa, Paul is a really cool writer. So, they go like this. The first one ends with the *sia*, then *ah*, then *I*, the next one, the *sia*, then *ah*, and then *I*. He says theirs are the fathers.

Theirs are the ancestors. Later on in 11:28, he's going to say that they are beloved on account of the fathers. He's also going to speak of the *namathasia*, the giving of the law.

But it's not just these things, but also there's some things that are experienced by all believers. He talks about them having the adoption and glory, spiritual service, priestly kind of service, and promises. Well, elsewhere in Romans, the adoption, he's just talked about 8:15 and 8:23, that's for believers.

Glory, well, we're going to be glorified, 8:18, 8:21. Spiritual service, so come to that later. 12:1 is where he uses the same term again, where we are presenting our bodies as living sacrifice, which is our service, our priestly service before God. And the promises, back in 1:2 and 4:16, we also are heirs of the promises.

So, these things were promises given to Israel, and we also have experienced some of them. And then he goes on in verse 5 to speak of Christ, apparently Christ who is God. Again, here's something where scholars are divided, although I think they're divided just because it's so shocking because Paul doesn't usually use that designation for Jesus.

He speaks of Jesus' divinity in different ways. After the Council of Nicaea, I think we got more prosaic, and we had to use particular wording to communicate it. And even before Nicaea, people were arguing about those kinds of details, and that helps us to be precise.

But Paul and other New Testament writers would use language for Jesus' deity that was just understandable in their time. Certain things that are said about Jesus, he's going to baptize in the Holy Spirit. Well, who has the authority to pour out God's Spirit? So, when John the Baptist speaks of one coming after him who's going to baptize in the Spirit and in fire, you get the idea the one coming after him is divine.

Jesus says, how I long to gather your children, Jerusalem, under my wings. Well, that's the kind of description that's used for God in the Psalms, and was used for God in contemporary Jewish literature, and gathering. Even converts to Judaism were viewed as those who came under the wings of the Shekinah, under the wings of God's presence.

It's all over the place in the New Testament. It's certainly revelation. It's all over the place.

Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end, Isaianic language for God. It's applied to the Father. It's also applied to Jesus here.

So, in the book of Revelation, he's the first and the last. He's the beginning and the ending. One place calls him the beginning.

So, it's there, but it doesn't usually use that language. But since it's there, in other cases, why not use the language? He says Christ is from the Israelites, according to the flesh. Christ, apparently it says, who is God blessed over all.

It doesn't have to be translated that way, but that seems to be the most normal way to translate it if we are not concerned about this is awkward. Why does he call him this? Lord itself was a divine title, often the way Paul uses it. It didn't always have to be like that as normally, God normally would be.

But Lord can be that certainly Paul uses it that way, sometimes very clearly uses it that way, 1 Corinthians 8, 6, and so on. Paul's introductory blessings from the Father and from Jesus, we talked about that in Romans 1. Paul applies Old Testament texts about God to Jesus. The Shema in 1 Corinthians 8, Philippians 2, where every knee will bow, every tongue will confess, Isaiah 45, that's talking about before God.

Well, in Philippians 2, it's applied to Jesus as he's exalted as Lord. Even in Romans 10.13, whoever calls him in the name of the Lord will be saved. Well, he's just described calling him in the name of the Lord in chapter 10, verses 9 and 10, as confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.

So, since Paul elsewhere describes Jesus' deity, including in Romans, it wouldn't be too surprising if here he uses another term, even though it's not his usual term, to describe him as God in a doxology, which normally would only praise God. Well, as

we said earlier, in Romans 9-11, Paul comes to the heart of his argument. Jewish people believed that they were chosen in Abraham, but Paul said, for not all those who are from Israel, verse 6, are Israel, verse 7, nor because they are Abraham's seed are they all his children.

Rather, in Isaac, your seed will be called. How many sons did Abraham have before Sarah died? I specify that because he had others in Genesis 25 after Sarah died, but he had two, Isaac by Sarah and Ishmael by Hagar. Well, which one received the promise? In this case, both were blessed.

There was a blessing for Ishmael also, but Isaac received the promise. How many sons did Isaac have? Well, he had two, Jacob and Esau, but which one received the promise? And Paul's point is that ethnic descent from Abraham isn't enough. If not all of the first generation received the promise, if not all the second generation received the promise, what makes you think that everybody received the promise now? When the Exodus took place, most of Israel didn't obey Moses and therefore didn't obey God.

So, as Moses says, it's not me you speak against, it's the Lord. And that generation died in the wilderness. And the psalmist says, today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as they did in the wilderness.

Some generations were better than others, but it wasn't automatic that you were saved just by being descended from Abraham. And you couldn't just take for granted based on your ethnicity or based on your heritage any more than a Christian, somebody who's been raised in church can say, well, I depend on my parents and grandparents are good Christians. I'm going to be with God no matter what.

You have to also accept Christ. A lot of people who grew up with it, don't even know when they did it. They've done it.

And that's the important thing. But we need to, we can't just depend on our heritage. As some people have said, God has no grandchildren.

But the choice was by grace. It was not by merit. Now, does that mean that God predestines us without any free will? Well, Paul wouldn't have to get into that because those kinds of issues were already talked about.

Other people already thought about those things. In Jewish tradition, they acknowledge both human responsibility and God's sovereignty. Now, Josephus, who's trying to parallel things to Greek philosophic sects, says that the Essenes were just fully predestinarian.

The Sadducees, didn't believe in providence at all. They were more like Epicureans. They didn't believe in afterlife either.

Josephus depicts them as Epicurean philosophers. And then he presents the Pharisees as the very popular Stoic sect. It's kind of in between where they say, on the other hand, they use both their hands.

They speak of both God's sovereignty and also human responsibility. But if you actually read the Dead Sea Scrolls, we don't have writings left from the Sadducees, but if you actually read the Dead Sea Scrolls, it seems like there's something of both there too. Clearly, they were predestinarian, but they also seemed to believe in human choice as well and certainly human responsibility.

So it wasn't that kind of debate at this time. The Greek fathers spoke of, they emphasized free will in a way we don't have emphasized, I think, in the Bible because they had to combat rising determinism in the philosophic trends of their day, especially through astrology and so on. The Greek fathers emphasized free will versus an arbitrary determinism in their culture.

Augustine had believed in that in his early writings. In his later writings, Augustine has a much heavier emphasis on predestination because he wants to counter Pelagius's emphasis on human perfection. So, it's important to take the different sources in the context of what they're addressing and their emphasis in terms of what they're addressing.

And in Paul's day, you didn't have to make this kind of forced choice that some people have talked about today. In chapter 9 verses 11 through 13, he clearly emphasizes predestination. He clearly is emphasizing God's choice.

God chose and loved Jacob before he was born. And you may say that's because he foreknew what Jacob's choices would be, and that may well be the case. I'm not going into all that, but it depends on how you take the word foreknew back in chapter 8. But the point in any case is that it's about God's purpose and calling.

It's not about our merit. It's God's grace that saves us. It's not something that we ourselves do.

It's God who works in us. For Paul, he comes at it from all sorts of different angles. But for Paul, it's always God.

It's always Christ. It's always the Spirit. That's what it's about.

Salvation, empowerment to live for God, and empowerment to minister for God, it comes from God itself. And that's a reason for us to praise him and give him glory, as

Paul can't help but do at the end of this section 9 through 11, and as Paul can't help but doing even bursting with the doxology, however you take the doxology, in chapter 9 and verse 5. And that's also how we should respond.

We'll pick up more of chapter 9 in the next session.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 10 on Romans 8:23-9:16.