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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

THE eighth chapter of this Epistle occupies a position of peculiar significance in the development of the Pauline argument. It is therefore of the first importance to determine its proper relationship with the chapters which precede it. Many scholars believe that the natural sequence and structure of the Epistle compel us to view it in immediate connection with the seventh chapter. They regard it as the logical counterpart of the introspective dissertation in which the inner conflict of the regenerate soul is laid bare. Certainly it is as though we tread our way through an almost starless night while we study the seventh chapter, and it is as though we burst upon the splendour of a midsummer morning when we open the eighth chapter. The stern analysis of the one is only relieved by a single fragment of thanksgiving towards the close, and even that is followed by a solemn restatement of the mysterious dualism which torments the soul (cf. Moule, p. 203). The grand revelation of the other is undisturbed by a single element of misgiving throughout its course, and it gradually rises to the first full statement of the final glory that awaits the child of God. Thus it is natural that devout students should regard the eighth chapter as a glorious sequel to the seventh. It is natural that they should find an answer to the problems of sin and self in its wonderful revelation of the subduing power of the Heavenly Agent, the Holy Spirit. But it is not right to regard it solely or even mainly as a definite expansion of the train of thought initiated in the seventh chapter. That chapter may supply it with a special motive, but it is a powerful and independent discussion worked out on a different basis and with a different viewpoint. It is not right to regard it even as a dogmatic resumption of any particular paragraph in the previous argument. That argument is recalled to the mind of the readers at the outset, but the Apostle begins anew in a way that owes no absolute allegiance to any single passage in the earlier discussion. The first verse

represents a fresh start in the Apostolic argument, and the words that follow constitute a magnificent review of the one grand topic which dominates his mind: The Security of the Saints.

The first reason for this conclusion is based upon the character of the particle in the opening verse: THEREFORE. This word in its English usage is always employed when one intends to explain or to enforce an earlier statement, and it is natural to assume that the Greek term will bear a similar construction. This has led some men to refer the meaning of the word in this particular verse back to the account of the inner conflict in the passage which precedes it. The text is in fact sometimes arranged in print so as to make the first paragraph of the eighth chapter follow on in uninterrupted sequence from the last paragraph of the seventh chapter. But there is nothing in the last words of that chapter to warrant the use of such a particle in this verse, or to suggest the conclusion that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This has led other men to connect it with some point more remote in the general argument, and they have gone back to various parts of the Epistle in their search for a satisfactory antecedent. But every attempt of this kind compels its author to strain the text in order to adduce clear proof of his point, and this is out of harmony with the severe logic of the Pauline argument. The fact is that both these theories fail to grasp the proper meaning of this word: THEREFORE. This single term in the English language is used to translate two distinct words in the Greek tongue, and accordingly it cannot reproduce the subtle shade of meaning which differentiates the original expressions. The word *ἀρα* is less definite, and denotes a subjective impression, while the word *οὖν* is more definite, and denotes an objective decision. The former is an inferential particle which conveys a general conclusion, while the latter is a syllogistic particle which conveys a positive conclusion. In the case of *ἀρα*, the argument is left to the mind of the reader rather than expressed in so many words, and it simply indicates the general inference from facts which have already been established. In the case of *οὖν*, the syllogism is made explicit in the text rather than left to the mind of the reader, and it obviously indicates a necessary conclusion from certain definite premises. It is the less definite inferential particle which occurs in this verse, and that supplies

the key to the one solution that satisfies every point. The word **THEREFORE** refers neither to the last paragraph of the seventh chapter nor to something more remote in the previous argument. It simply sums up in itself the whole trend of the past thought by way of general conclusion. A proper conception of this term will accordingly rule out the theory of an immediate connection with the seventh chapter, but will enable us to view the first paragraph of the eighth chapter against its real background.

The next reason for this conclusion is based upon the character of the expression in the opening verse: **NO CONDEMNATION**. Those who think that these words follow on in direct sequence from the last paragraph of the previous chapter, relate them to the doctrine of sanctification and interpret them in an experimental sense. They hold that the seventh chapter is full of the idea of self-condemnation, while the eighth chapter is full of the idea of no condemnation, and accordingly they think that this is a fitting climax to the lengthy account of the inner conflict of the regenerate soul. But although this method of exegesis is both ingenious and attractive, it does not fit in with the facts of the case. The word **CONDEMNATION** only occurs three times altogether in the New Testament, and each occurrence is to be found in this Epistle (cf. v. 16, 18). The cognate verb is much more frequent, but the actual usage of the noun is of primary importance in seeking to establish its meaning. A careful study shews that it always occurs in a judicial sense, and that fact stamps this verse as a strong assertion of justification. This means that it cannot be taken in an experimental sense, and that fact wipes out the view that it is a bold pronouncement on sanctification. Thus the first verse of the eighth chapter strikes the grand note of the present acceptance of every child of God, and we cannot interpret it as a continuation from the discussion of the previous chapter on Christian sanctity. This conclusion receives support from the general consensus of manuscript authorities which defer to the close of the fourth verse the reference to those "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". The first verse deals with one question only, and that is not how we walk before God, but how we stand before God. It is a profound statement of the eternal condition of those who have been justified, and the later strains of the same chapter recur to this theme once and

again. We read: "Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: And whom He called, them He also justified" (Rom. viii. 30). And again: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died . . ." (Rom. viii. 33, 34). Thus it is thoroughly consonant with the whole chapter to regard the first verse as a fresh departure in the development of the Apostolic argument.

The last reason for this conclusion is based upon the character of the verb in the second verse: **HATH MADE FREE**. Those who think that the first paragraph of the eighth chapter was written to develop the doctrine of sanctification are wont to make a great deal of this verse: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (viii. 2). But they isolate it from its context, and quote it in a way that is quite contrary to the actual facts. It is not as though it were a direct sequel to the fragment of thanksgiving towards the close of the seventh chapter. That chapter does indeed strike a momentary note of hopeful outlook in the well-known words: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (vii. 24, 25). But it immediately adds, and accordingly ends, with a conclusive re-statement of the strife of the soul: "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (vii. 25). Then there is a distinct pause in the Apostle's thought, a complete break in the Epistle's text, and the new chapter opens on a different note: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which 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" (viii. 1, 2). The distinctive particle which connects these two verses indicates that they stand side by side in the closest mutual relationship and inter-dependence. The second verse amplifies the meaning of the first verse, and explains why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The reason is because in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has made them free from the law of sin and death. Now the aorist tense in this verse indicates that it is a simple statement of an actual fact, and it leaves us to determine the time element from the context. The verb itself is almost timeless, for it merely states that something has started. The general

sense of the passage alone can decide whether the start is a sudden climax which is complete in an instant, or a new beginning which has continuous effects. Thus the aorist tense of the verb HATH MADE FREE refers to the work of deliverance as a definite event, complete in itself, that lies in the past, while the subsequent verses indicate that the results of which it is fruitful are continuous in the present. This is a final proof that the chapter begins with a strong assertion of the accomplished fact of justification, not of the gradual process of sanctification. Thus the aorist tense of the verb fits in with the general character of the context to prove that this verse is not a direct sequel to the last words of the previous chapter. On the contrary, it provides the strongest support for the view that the eighth chapter constitutes an independent element in the structure of the Epistle.

Thus a thorough and thoughtful examination of the text leads us to the unequivocal conclusion that the eighth chapter is a separate entity in the construction of the Epistle. Doubtless it is a magnificent sequel to the introspective discussion of the painful strife of a regenerate soul. Doubtless the seventh chapter does form the immediate background, and supplies the particular motive which we must bear in mind as we stand upon its threshold. But it is not a mere development in the train of thought that marks the close of that chapter. It makes a fresh start in the evolution of the Apostolic argument. It begins *de novo* in the unfolding of the doctrinal position. It turns aside from the discussion of sanctification in order to repeat the assertion of justification for those who are in Christ Jesus, and thence it proceeds to unfold the blessed present of liberty, and the eternal future of glory for every child of God. It opens with a verse which marks the place where the various rivulets of the foregoing arguments meet and merge in one mighty river, and thence it proceeds to shew how that river flows on its way towards the boundless ocean of a blissful eternity. It is therefore a complete whole in tone and topic, and it forms the crown on the entire structure of the previous argument.

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