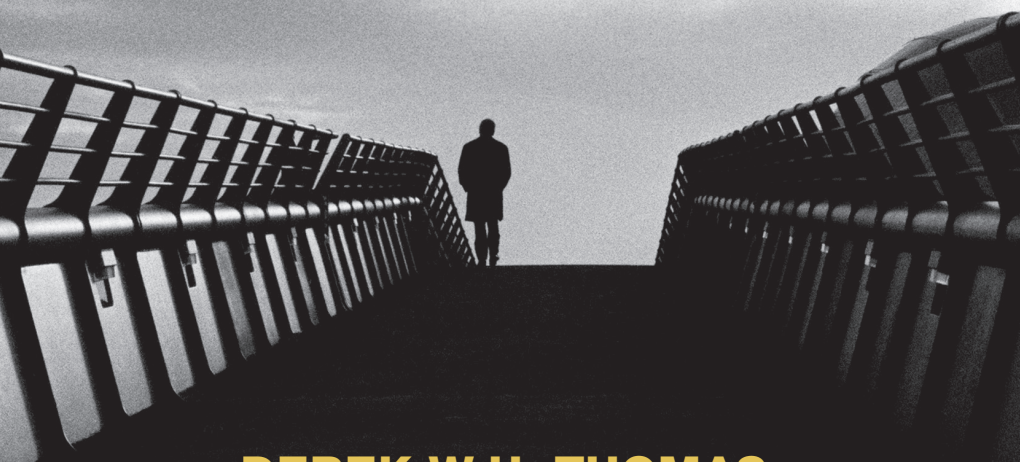


HOW THE GOSPEL BRINGS US ALL THE WAY HOME



DEREK W.H. THOMAS

ENDORSEMENTS

“While Christians may believe that the gospel merely begins our Christian lives, Derek Thomas shows us convincingly that the gospel is the beginning, middle, and end of our lives—indeed, that it is status-shaping, holiness-motivating, and glory-providing. Moving through the grand biblical themes of Romans 8 that shape our understanding of who and whose we are, believers will see that our union with Jesus determines everything about us. Would that my church members might marinate in these truths and so emerge gospel-soaked and gospel-encouraged.”

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Senior pastor, Third Avenue Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.

Author, *What Is the Gospel?*

**HOW THE
GOSPEL
BRINGS US
ALL THE
WAY HOME**

DEREK W.H. THOMAS



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home

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To
Paul Stephenson
⊕
Don Breazeale

In loss,
they make Romans 8
incarnational

*“No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!”*

From the hymn
“And Can It Be That I Should Gain”
by Charles Wesley (1738)

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Foreword

There is an expression, “Horses for courses.” It means that not everyone does everything equally well all of the time. For example, I have heard top-level professional golfers talk about the tournament courses they prefer because “they seem to suit my eye.”

In the same way, if you are to purchase an entire book devoted to one chapter of the Bible, and that chapter is Romans 8, voted by acclamation to be among the greatest of all—profound in theology, soaring in eloquence, thrilling in impact—you don’t want “just anybody” to be the author.

What, then, do you want? Probably someone with the ability to grasp the flow of Paul’s logic; someone who is able to handle each text in its context; someone with a keen theological mind and a knowledge of the human heart; someone with long spiritual experience and the insight of years of studying Scripture and observing the Lord’s ways; and someone who has music in his soul, who knows that the gospel sings, and who can reach both the low notes and the high ones.

If that is what you want in the author of a book on Romans 8, you have come to the right place—Derek Thomas is the author

for you and *How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home* is the book for you. In these pages, Dr. Thomas brings all of the above characteristics to bear in a rich and wonderfully accessible exposition of this magnificent chapter of Scripture. In these pages, to transform some words of John Milton, “The hungry sheep look up and will be fed.”

Derek Thomas is well known among Christians in the English-speaking world for three things. He is first and foremost an outstanding preacher; he is a learned and much-loved seminary professor; and he is the author of numerous books, many written for the “ordinary Christian,” while others have been of special value to seminary students and scholars. The many aspects of his ministry, taken together, underline his sense that all of the gospel is for all of the people of God.

Among the best representatives of the Reformed theological tradition, of whom Derek Thomas is one, these three ministries—preacher, professor, author—are really one calling expressed in three ways—the fruit of an ongoing pursuit of, growth in, and sharing of the knowledge of God. When this knowledge is expressed in what our forefathers used to call a “feeling manner”—with pathos, spiritual affection, a passion for Christ, and a love for the people of God—the result is preaching, teaching, and writing that informs the mind, reaches the affections, bows the will in submission, and transforms the whole of life. Herein lies Dr. Thomas’s special grace-gift, and the most obvious characteristic of this book.

It might be suspected that a foreword marked by such enthusiasm could be written only by a personal friend. I happily plead

FOREWORD

“guilty” to the charge of friendship with Derek Thomas, but that only adds to the pleasure any Christian will find in reading these pages. Over the thirty-five years we have known each other, I have often thought of the privilege it is to be able to count him as a friend, wise counselor, and fellow servant of Christ and His people. It is one of the very special blessings of belonging to the Christian brotherhood that one can admire the abilities of another without being consumed by jealousy because we all realize with Paul that we have nothing except what we have received from the Lord—so that we can rejoice in His gifts to others and not only to ourselves.

As you open these pages, you will find that Derek Thomas also becomes your good friend and trusted guide as he leads you through the glorious message of Romans 8, taking you from the joy and peace of “no condemnation” in the chapter’s first verse to the assurance of “no separation” in the last verse. I count it an honor to commend these pages. But it is not in this page, but in the ones that follow, and in the way the gospel brings us all the way home, that you will find this book’s best commendation, and the only one it really needs.

Now, as my parents sometimes would say to me as I left their presence when a teenager, “Just go, and enjoy yourself!”

—*Sinclair B. Ferguson*
First Presbyterian Church
Columbia, South Carolina
January 2011

Preface

The contents of these pages began as a series of sermons I preached at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, during the summer of 2009. My friend (and boss), J. Ligon Duncan III, was granted a well-earned and (as was later evident) well-used sabbatical, and in his place I was asked to preach a series of Sunday morning sermons. I decided to preach a series covering the eighth chapter of Romans, a series I titled *The Best Chapter in the Bible*—a title remarkably similar, I later discovered, to one used by Dr. James Montgomery Boice of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.¹ Many of those who heard my sermons at the time commented on the profit they received, and some urged that I commit the series to book form.

Here it is—almost, for as every preacher knows, what “works” in a sermon does not always read as well, and the reverse is also true, perhaps more so. Consequently, even though the original sermons can be heard via the church’s website,² there are aspects of this book that did not get preached.

No chapter of Scripture reaches the same sustained levels or covers the same ground as Romans 8. It is a description of the Christian life from death to life, from justification to glorification,

from trial and suffering to the peace and tranquility of the new heaven and new earth. It contains exhortations to persevere as well as reassurances of God's preservation of His people. And no chapter has been cited more than this one in expounding the application of redemption in the life of an individual (the *ordo salutis*). In short, Romans 8 gives us a picture of salvation in its completeness. For this reason, I have titled this little book *How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home*.

Gratitude is the appropriate gospel response to grace received, and I am one to whom much grace has been shown in terms of my calling and vocation. I am especially grateful that, in addition to teaching systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, I also serve as the minister of teaching at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson. The joy of serving alongside fellow ministers of the gospel in this historical church is incalculable, and the generosity of the church's senior minister is second to none. I am especially grateful for the warmth with which these sermons were received by the members and friends of First Presbyterian Church.

My life would be immeasurably poorer without the love and friendship of my wife, Rosemary. Although she owes me for her devotion to baseball, I owe her far more, and the hours spent in writing another book have meant baseball in one room and Romans 8 in another. I recall with great fondness the times when, struggling with Paul's phrase here and nuance there, I heard Rosemary shout at the TV when her beloved Atlanta Braves weren't playing according to her high standards. I do not share her love of baseball, but I love it that she loves it so. Her friendship over the past thirty-four years is an immense blessing.

PREFACE

I send this volume forth with the prayer that it might do the souls of those who read it much good. In particular, my longing is that these pages might rekindle a love for the gospel of Jesus Christ in our hearts. Truly, Jesus is the only hope we have and He is all we need.

—*Derek W. H. Thomas*
First Presbyterian Church/RTS
Jackson, Mississippi
Easter 2010

ROMANS 8:1-4

“There is therefore now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.
For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free
in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

For God has done what the law,
weakened by the flesh, could not do.
By sending his own Son in the likeness
of sinful flesh and for sin,
he condemned sin in the flesh,
in order that the righteous requirement
of the law might be fulfilled in us,
who walk not according to the flesh but
according to the Spirit.”

GRACE AND GRATITUDE

(Romans 8:1–4)

“Guilty!” I can still hear that word as I close my eyes. It was 1975 in Oxford, England. I was passing by the city courthouse, where a murder trial was reaching its conclusion. The details were gruesome and the daily papers had carried detailed accounts of each day’s court proceedings. I am not sure what made me attend the final day, but I did. I watched with fascination as the judge placed a black shawl on his head just before he pronounced the final verdict: “Guilty.” A roar of approval erupted in the courthouse. The defendant was found guilty of murder and condemned to a life sentence with no possibility of parole.

Just as that man was found guilty in the judge’s eyes, we are all guilty in God’s sight: “None is righteous, no, not one . . . all

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10, 23). Not a single human being is righteous by nature. No amount of Christian or gospel influence makes people righteous. All people are totally depraved—their motives, words, deeds, and thoughts are affected by their identity as sinners. The natural inclination of the heart, will, emotions, conscience, and physical body is in an opposite direction to holiness. As J. C. Ryle said: “Sin . . . pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected.”³

However, we are more than guilty; we are also condemned. God justly pronounces a death sentence upon us.

Unfair? No, our “condemnation is just” (Rom. 3:8). We inherit (through our identity with Adam) a sinful nature (cf. Rom. 5:16, 18). We sin because we *are* sinners. Apart from the gospel, our guilt condemns us forever.

Freedom from Condemnation, Sin, and Death

However, the eighth chapter of Romans begins with the best news imaginable: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Charles Wesley celebrates this truth in his hymn “And Can It Be That I Should Gain”:

No condemnation now I dread;

Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.⁴

“No condemnation now I dread” — that is what Paul is saying at the beginning of Romans 8. There is a way from condemnation to “no condemnation.”

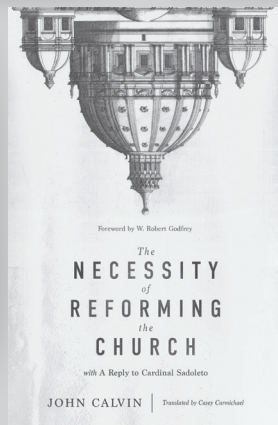
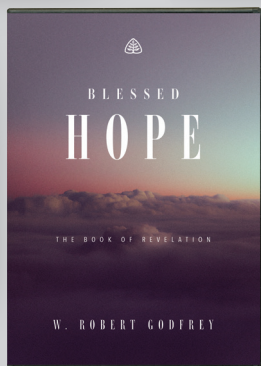
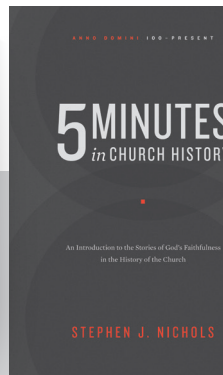
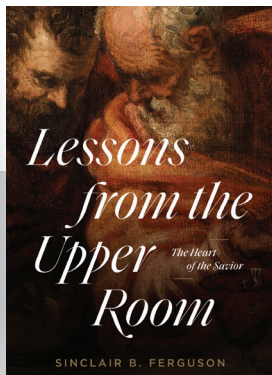
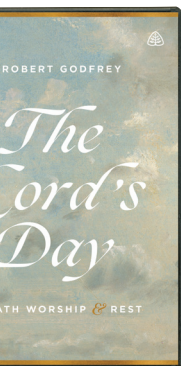
Similarly, Paul declares that Christians have been set free; they are emancipated: “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

Christians have been set free from “the law.” Paul is thinking of the law as a negative, imprisoning feature in our lives—and he is saying this after some fairly positive statements about the law in chapter 7:

- » “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin” (Rom. 7:7).
- » “I agree with the law, that it is good” (Rom. 7:16).
- » “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being” (Rom. 7:22).

In these verses, the apostle seems to be thinking about very positive ways in which the law functions in a believer’s life. But

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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