

Article

Φρόνημα in Romans 8: A Pauline Ethical Key

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Abstract

Romans 8 contains Paul's most concentrated reflection on the human person transformed by the Spirit, and at its center stands the rare term φρόνημα. Appearing only four times in the New Testament, all in Romans 8 (6 [x2], 7, 27), φρόνημα is commonly translated as "mindset", "disposition", or "attitude". These translations are useful but insufficient. They risk reducing Paul's term to a merely psychological state, whereas in Romans 8 φρόνημα names the deep orientation of the human person before God. This study argues that φρόνημα functions as an ethical and anthropological key: it expresses the inner direction of a life either determined by σάρξ or shaped by πνεῦμα. Through linguistic analysis, rhetorical exegesis of Rom 8:5–8 and 8:27, and dialogue with Jewish and Greco-Roman moral discourse, this article proposes that φρόνημα denotes the deep structure of Christian orientation: the Spirit-formed disposition from which perception, desire, obedience, prayer, suffering, and hope are reordered toward God.

Keywords: Romans 8; φρόνημα; φρονέω; πνεῦμα; σάρξ; Pauline exegesis; Pauline ethics; ethical cognition; transformation; moral formation; Christian orientation; anthropology

1. Introduction

The language of "mind" or "mindset" in Rom 8 must not be read as if Paul was speaking only about private interior thought. The noun φρόνημα belongs to a semantic field in which cognition, volition, desire, and practical conduct overlap. In Rom 8 Paul is not simply asking what a person thinks; he is asking what governs the person from within and toward what end the person is directed. The question is therefore not merely psychological but theological and ethical. It concerns the human being as a creature situated before God, under a power, and moving toward either death or life.

The rarity of φρόνημα gives the term special exegetical weight. In the New Testament the noun appears four times only in Rom 8, where Paul employs it in a dense sequence: τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός is death, τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is life and peace, τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός is hostility toward God, and God knows τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος because the Spirit intercedes according to God (Rom 8:6–7, 27). The repetition is not accidental. It binds together Paul's anthropology, pneumatology, and ethics by naming the directedness of the person as a whole.

Lexically, the noun derives from φρονέω, a verb that can mean "to think", "to set one's mind", "to be intent", "to judge", or "to adopt an attitude". BDAG defines φρόνημα as the "way of thinking" or "mindset", with emphasis on strong intention, aim, aspiration, or striving (Bauer et al. 2000, s.v. "φρόνημα"). LSJ gives a broader classical range, including "thought", "purpose", "will", "spirit", and "resolution" (Liddell et al. 1996, s.v. "φρόνημα"). BDF is also significant for the morphology of the noun: nouns in -μα often indicate the result of an action (Blass et al. 1961, § 109.2). Thus, φρόνημα may be read not



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simply as the act of thinking but as the settled result of φρονέω: a formed disposition, a practical orientation, the inward shape of a life.

Larry Perkins makes this point in a more pastoral but useful grammatical way: φρόνημα should be understood in relation to φρονέω, and the -μα ending suggests the result or settled product of minding, thinking, or being intent upon something (Perkins 2014). This observation helps clarify Paul's argument. Φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός is not merely a wrong idea, but an orientation of a life under the power of σάρξ. Likewise, φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is not merely religious thinking, but a Spirit-shaped orientation of the person who belongs to Christ. In this sense, φρόνημα is closer to an existential and ethical axis than to an isolated thought.

This interpretation corresponds to the broader movement of Rom 5–8. Paul has been describing a transfer of dominion: from Adam to Christ, from Sin to righteousness, from death to life, from enslaving powers to the liberating rule of God. Potgieter has shown that Rom 5–8 is permeated by metaphors of dominion—rule, slavery, liberation, lordship, and bodily space—and that Paul's argument presents the believer's body as a space in which powers contend and over which God must rule (Potgieter 2020, pp. 1–16, 215–40). Within this framework, φρόνημα is the interior correlate of dominion: it names the inward orientation corresponding to the power that governs a person.

This article argues that φρόνημα in Rom 8 functions as a Pauline ethical key. It is ethical because it determines conduct; anthropological because it describes the orientation of the person; pneumatological because the Spirit creates and sustains it; and eschatological because it moves toward death or life and peace. The article proceeds in five stages: first, it examines the semantic field of φρόνημα and φρονέω; second, it situates Rom 8 within the argument of Rom 5–8; third, it analyzes the genitives τῆς σαρκός and τοῦ πνεύματος; fourth, it places Paul's usage in Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts; and fifth, it argues that Rom 8:27 provides the theological climax of Paul's use of φρόνημα.

This study employs a lexical–exegetical method. First, it examines the semantic range of φρόνημα and φρονέω through major Greek lexica and grammatical resources, especially BDAG, LSJ, BDF, and TDNT (Bauer et al. 2000; Liddell et al. 1996; Blass et al. 1961; Bertram 1974). Second, it analyzes the four occurrences of φρόνημα in Rom 8:6, 7, and 27 within the rhetorical flow of Rom 8 and the larger argument of Rom 5–8. Third, it places Paul's usage in dialogue with Greco-Roman moral psychology and Jewish anthropological traditions, without reducing Paul's pneumatology to either background. Finally, it draws theological and ethical implications for Pauline moral formation.

The article uses “orientation” as a synthetic category. This term is not intended to replace Paul's φρόνημα, but to express the way the noun gathers cognition, intention, desire, and conduct into a single directed posture before God. “Orientation” also avoids the reduction of φρόνημα to a merely intellectual “mind” or a merely emotional “attitude”. It names the direction of the person as a whole.

This study must also be situated in relation to prior work on Pauline cognition language. Lee S. Bond's Aberdeen dissertation, later summarized in Tyndale Bulletin (Tyndale Bulletin 58/2 (2007): 317–20), has already shown the importance of φρόνημα and cognate terminology for understanding the relation between Pauline theology and ethics, especially in Romans and Philippians (Bond 2005). Bond argues that Paul uses cognition language as a “lexical bridge” between theological claims and ethical exhortation, and his chapter on Romans already anticipates several issues treated here (Bond 2007, pp. 317–20). The present article therefore does not claim to offer the first account of cognition language in Paul. Its contribution is more specific: it focuses on the function of τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος within Rom 8, where cognition, moral orientation, anthropological transformation, and the agency of the Spirit converge.

Finally, This study is interdisciplinary in scope. While its primary field is Pauline exegesis, it brings together lexical analysis, theological anthropology, and ethical reflection in order to clarify the meaning of φρόνημα in Romans 8. The article does not treat φρόνημα merely as an isolated lexical item, but as a term that gathers cognition, desire, orientation, and embodied existence before God. In this way, the study seeks to show how Paul's contrast between the φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός and the φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος belongs simultaneously to the fields of biblical semantics, moral psychology, and theological anthropology.

2. Φρόνημα's Semantic Field

The noun φρόνημα derives from φρονέω, and the two must be interpreted together. The verb φρονέω appears frequently in Paul, especially in Philippians and Romans. It can describe thinking, judging, caring, being intent, or adopting a posture toward others. In Philippians, for example, φρονέω is used not only for intellectual agreement but for communal unity, affection, humility, and Christ-shaped conduct (Phil 1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15; 4:2, 10). Kowalski rightly observes that, in Paul, φρονέω embraces a wide range of attitudes engaging intellect, reflection, volition, conduct, feelings, and care; it is Christocentric, heaven-oriented, and community-oriented (Kowalski 2020, pp. 53–56). This Pauline usage prepares the way for Rom 8, where the noun φρόνημα expresses the solidified orientation that corresponds either to σάρξ or to πνεῦμα.

BDAG's definition is especially important: φρόνημα is a “way of thinking” or “mind-set”, but with a focus on strong intention, aim, aspiration, or striving (Bauer et al. 2000, s.v. “φρόνημα”). LSJ confirms that the word cannot be confined to cognition alone, since its semantic range includes thought, purpose, will, spirit, and resolution (Liddell et al. 1996, s.v. “φρόνημα”). TDNT places the word within the wider φρήν/φρονέω family, where reflection, understanding, intention, and practical stance overlap (Bertram 1974, pp. 220–35). These lexical witnesses support the view that φρόνημα in Rom 8 is not a neutral mental faculty but a directed moral and existential posture.

BDF contributes a morphological observation that is particularly useful for the present argument. In Koine Greek, nouns ending in -μα often denote the result of an action (Blass et al. 1961, § 109.2). If φρόνημα is read in relation to φρονέω, the noun may designate the result of minding, thinking, or being intent: the settled orientation formed by the act of φρονέω. The point should not be pressed mechanically, but it coheres with Paul's usage. In Rom 8:5 Paul uses the verb φρονοῦσιν; in Rom 8:6–7 he uses the noun φρόνημα. The movement from verb to noun suggests that Paul is not merely contrasting occasional acts of thought but stable orientations of existence.

The lexical evidence must therefore be used cautiously. Standard lexica such as BDAG, LSJ, TDNT, and MGS are useful for establishing the semantic range of φρόνημα and its cognates, but they do not by themselves determine the force of the term in Rom 8 (Danker 2000, s.v. “φρόνημα”; Liddell et al. 1996, s.v. “φρόνημα”; Friedrich 1964–1976, s.v. “φρονέω”; Montanari 2015, s.v. “φρόνημα”). Meaning emerges from usage in context, not from a simple accumulation of glosses. In this respect, Greg Fewster's study of creation language in Rom 8 is methodologically instructive. Although Fewster examines κτίσις rather than φρόνημα, his insistence on semantic discipline cautions against assigning multiple theological meanings to a word without sufficient contextual control (Fewster 2013, pp. 88–89, 167). Applied to φρόνημα, this means that the term should not be reduced to “mind” as an isolated faculty, but neither should it be overloaded with meanings detached from Paul's argument. In Rom 8, its sense is determined by the contrast between σάρξ and πνεῦμα, the movement from death to life, and the Spirit's role in shaping the believer's orientation before God.

The semantic distinction between φρόνημα and other anthropological terms also matters. νοῦς often emphasizes mind or understanding as a faculty; διάνοια can emphasize thought, reflection, or understanding; καρδιά frequently refers to the interior person, the heart as the seat of perception, will, and desire. φρόνημα, however, points to the formed direction of practical interiority. It is the posture from which one evaluates, desires, acts, obeys, prays, and hopes. This does not make φρόνημα irrational. Rather, it places rationality within a larger moral and theological orientation.

The significance of this point has often been obscured by translations that render φρόνημα simply as “mind”. Such translations are not wrong, but they are incomplete. “Mind” in modern usage often suggests cognition detached from will and desire. Paul’s φρόνημα, by contrast, involves the whole person in relation to a ruling power. It is “mind” as direction, “mindset” as allegiance, “disposition” as destiny. In Romans 8, the person does not merely have a φρόνημα, but he is disclosed by it.

3. Φρόνημα in the Argument of Rom 5–8

Romans 8 does not begin a new theological topic; it crowns the movement that begins in Rom 5. Paul has narrated the new situation created by Christ: grace reigns through righteousness toward eternal life (Rom 5:21); believers have died to Sin (Rom 6:1–11); they are no longer enslaved to Sin (Rom 6:12–23); they have been released from the Law as condemning power (Rom 7:1–6); and they cry out for deliverance from the “body of death” (Rom 7:24–25). Rom 8 answers that cry with the declaration: “There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).

This context is essential for interpreting φρόνημα. Rom 5–8 is not merely a psychological discussion about the inner life. It is a theological account of transferred lordship. Potgieter’s analysis argues that Rom 5–8 is saturated with dominion metaphors, including reign, slavery, liberation, and the body as contested space (Potgieter 2020, pp. 17–35, 215–40). The modern notion of autonomous selfhood, she observes, is not the controlling assumption of Paul’s world; ancient persons were understood as living under powers, rulers, lords, or gods (Potgieter 2020, pp. 1–16). Paul does not ask whether the human person is governed, but by whom.

In Rom 6, Paul contrasts slavery to Sin with slavery to righteousness and obedience to God. In Rom 7, the “I” experiences the tragedy of willing the good but being unable to perform it under the power of Sin. In Rom 8, the Spirit appears as the liberating and indwelling power who makes possible what the Law could not accomplish. Therefore, when Paul introduces φρόνημα in Rom 8:5–8, the issue is not abstract psychology but embodied allegiance. The body is contested, and φρόνημα reveals which power governs the human person from within.

This explains why Paul can speak so starkly: τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος and τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη (Rom 8:6). The orientation is not neutral. It belongs to a regime. The first belongs to the old dominion of Sin and death; the second belongs to the new dominion of the Spirit, life, and peace. Potgieter notes that the repeated use of φρόνημα in Rom 8:6–8 establishes a metaphorical pattern for comparing the dominions of flesh and Spirit, and that κατὰ σάρκα corresponds to death while κατὰ πνεῦμα corresponds to life and peace (Potgieter 2020, pp. 170–75). This confirms that φρόνημα functions as an interior marker of lordship.

Aletti’s reading of Rom 5–8 as a coherent theological and rhetorical unit also supports this interpretation. Rom 8 is not an appendix to justification but the culmination of Paul’s account of the saving work of God in Christ and the Spirit (Aletti 2012, pp. 61–138; 2023). The Spirit does not simply add a devotional dimension to salvation; the Spirit actualizes

the new life created by Christ. φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is therefore the inward form of this new life.

Romans 8:5 forms the basis of Paul's contrast: οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος. The participial phrase οἱ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες describes more than behavior. It names a mode of existence: those who are "according to flesh". The verb φρονοῦσιν then discloses the inner orientation corresponding to that existence. Those who are according to flesh mind "the things of the flesh"; those who are according to Spirit mind "the things of the Spirit".

The syntax shows a movement from mode of existence to interior orientation and then to outcome. First, there is existence κατὰ σάρκα or κατὰ πνεῦμα. Second, there is the corresponding act of φρονέω: minding the things of flesh or Spirit. Third, in Rom 8:6, there is the result: death or life and peace. Paul is therefore not saying that bad thoughts lead to death in a merely moralistic sense. He is saying that a life determined by σάρξ has an inner direction whose reality and end is death. Conversely, a life determined by πνεῦμα has an inner direction whose reality and end is life and peace.

Romans 8:6 intensifies the point: τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη. The absence of an explicit verb is striking. Most translations supply "is", though some prefer "means" or "leads to". The ellipsis allows Paul's statement to retain a compressed force. The fleshly φρόνημα does not merely produce death at the end of a process; it already participates in death as a present mode of existence. Likewise, the φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is not merely the road to life and peace; it is already the presence of life and peace in those who belong to Christ (Cranfield 1975, pp. 386–88; Moo 2018, pp. 486–89; Jewett and Kotansky 2007, pp. 486–88).

The phrase ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη is also significant. ζωὴ evokes the life promised in Christ, while εἰρήνη recalls the peace with God announced in Rom 5:1. The contrast with ἔχθρα in Rom 8:7 confirms this relational dimension. The φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is not simply inward tranquility; it is reconciled existence before God. Conversely, φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς is not simply moral weakness; it is hostility toward God. The antithesis is therefore theological before it is psychological.

Romans 8:7 explains why the fleshly orientation is death: διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν. The phrase ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν does not describe a merely subjective feeling of dislike. It describes an objective relation of hostility and estrangement. The fleshly orientation "does not submit to the law of God, for it cannot" (Rom 8:7). This incapacity is not intellectual inability alone. The person under σάρξ is not merely uninformed but misdirected. The problem is not lack of data but hostile orientation.

Kowalski's study of Rom 8:5–6 is crucial here. He argues that, in Rom 8, the Spirit fulfills cognitive functions: the Spirit guides believers, shapes their thinking, and is responsible for their moral life (Kowalski 2020, pp. 47–48). The Spirit's work comes to the foreground precisely in Rom 8:5–6, where Paul focuses on the way of thinking and the ethical attitudes of believers (Kowalski 2020, pp. 47–48). This does not mean that Paul reduces the Spirit to reason. Rather, it means that the Spirit transforms the cognitive–ethical center of the person. The Spirit is not merely an external power commanding obedience; the Spirit works at the level of perception, judgment, desire, and conduct.

Kowalski further observes that φρονέω in Paul encompasses intellect, reflection, volition, conduct, feelings, and care, while φρόνημα describes the contrasting aspirations of the Spirit and the flesh and the workings of the Spirit who intercedes for believers according to God's will (Kowalski 2020, pp. 53–57). This supports the central claim of the present article: φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is a Spirit-produced ethical orientation. It is not merely a religious opinion but a transformed way of perceiving and living.

Romans 8:8 completes the negative side of Paul's argument: οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσαι οὐ δύνανται. Those who are "in flesh" cannot please God. This statement must be read in relation to Rom 8:9, where Paul immediately says that the addressees are not in flesh but in Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in them. The decisive distinction is not moral effort in abstraction but sphere of belonging. To be "in flesh" is to belong to the old realm; to be "in Spirit" is to belong to the new realm inaugurated by God in Christ.

4. The Genitives: τῆς σαρκός and τοῦ πνεύματος

The genitives in φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός and φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος have been variously understood as genitives of source, content, quality, or sphere. A strict choice may be unnecessary because Paul's language is dense enough to include several dimensions. The φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός is produced by σάρξ, characterized by σάρξ, and located within the sphere of σάρξ. Likewise, the φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is produced by πνεῦμα, characterized by πνεῦμα, and located within the sphere of πνεῦμα.

Potgieter reads the genitives in Rom 8:6 as qualitative, describing the goal or character of each mindset within Paul's contrast between dominions (Potgieter 2020, pp. 170–75). This interpretation rightly emphasizes that Paul is not speaking about two neutral cognitive contents. The genitives identify the power that gives the φρόνημα its quality and direction. The fleshly orientation is not simply thinking about fleshly objects; it is an orientation shaped by the sphere and power of σάρξ. The Spirit's orientation is not simply thinking about spiritual topics; it is an orientation shaped by the indwelling Spirit.

This reading avoids two extremes. On the one hand, φρόνημα is not autonomous human rationality. Paul is not presenting the moral life as the self's independent mastery over desire. On the other hand, φρόνημα is not passive possession that eliminates human agency. The Spirit reorients the person, but the person walks, minds, puts to death, suffers, prays, and hopes within that new orientation. The indicative and the imperative are therefore held together. Paul can say that believers are in the Spirit because the Spirit dwells in them (Rom 8:9), and he can still exhort them to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (Rom 8:13).

Thompson's account of Pauline ethics is helpful at this point. He argues that Paul's moral vision is coherent and rooted in the story of Christ, the continuing moral significance of God's will, and the formation of communities whose conduct embodies their new identity (Thompson 2011). Rom 8 confirms this pattern. Ethics flows from participation in Christ through the Spirit. Paul's exhortation is grounded in a transformed mode of existence, not in detached moralism.

5. Jewish Anthropological Resonance

Second Temple Jewish anthropology often describes the human interior through categories such as heart, spirit, wisdom, inclination, and obedience. Paul's φρόνημα is not identical with the rabbinic yetzer, and the latter category should not be projected anachronistically into Paul. Yet the comparison is illuminating at the level of anthropological structure: human life is not neutral. It is bent, inclined, oriented. One lives either toward God or away from God.

The prophetic background is especially important. Rom 8 echoes the promise that God will act within the human person, not merely upon external behavior. Jeremiah 31:31–34 speaks of the law written on the heart; Ezek 36:26–27 promises a new heart and a new spirit, with God's Spirit placed within the people so that they walk in God's statutes. Kowalski explicitly connects Rom 8 to this prophetic promise: the indwelling Spirit implies an internal transformation of the human being and enables moral action, fulfilling the promise of Ezek 36:27 that God will place the Spirit within his people and cause them

to live according to his commandments (Kowalski 2020, pp. 56–57). This background is central for interpreting φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος. The Spirit does not merely inform the believer; the Spirit inscribes a new direction within the person.

This prophetic horizon prevents a purely Hellenistic reading of φρόνημα. Paul is not simply adopting philosophical moral psychology. He is articulating the new-covenant transformation of the human being by the Spirit of God. The φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is therefore the anthropological effect of the promised Spirit. It is what happens when the new covenant reaches the inner person.

Jewish wisdom traditions also help illuminate the cognitive and ethical dimensions of the term. Wisdom is not mere information; it is ordered life before God. The wise person knows how to live because perception, desire, and action are aligned with God's will. This resonates with Paul's contrast between σάρξ and πνεῦμα. The Spirit-shaped person does not simply possess correct ideas; the person perceives reality according to God's act in Christ and lives accordingly.

A comparable polarity appears in Jas 3:13–18, a passage deeply marked by Jewish wisdom tradition. James contrasts the “wisdom from below”, characterized as earthly, unspiritual, and disorder-producing, with the “wisdom from above”, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, merciful, fruitful, and productive of righteousness. Although James does not employ Paul's terminology of φρόνημα, this sapiential contrast offers a useful parallel to Paul's opposition between τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς and τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος in Rom 8:6–7. The comparison should not be pressed too far: James frames the contrast in wisdom categories, whereas Paul's language in Rom 8 is more explicitly pneumatological. Nevertheless, both texts reflect a similar moral and theological polarity between an earthly and disordered orientation and a God-given orientation that produces life, peace, and righteousness.

6. Greco-Roman Moral Psychology and Paul's Distinctiveness

The Greco-Roman background also matters. Stoic thought associated πνεῦμα with perception, rationality, ethical formation, and the ordering of the self. Kowalski notes that, in the Greco-Roman context, pneuma could be connected with perception, thinking, and ethical choices, and that Stoic theory associated the tension of pneuma with virtues, talents, and mental attitudes (Kowalski 2020, pp. 48–50). This background shows that Paul's audience could have heard cognitive and ethical resonances in his language of Spirit and minding.

Nevertheless, Paul's use remains distinctive. He does not present the Spirit as an impersonal cosmic substance or as a rational principle available through philosophical training. The Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Christ, given eschatologically, personally, and relationally. This is where Paul differs from Stoic ethical intellectualism. For the Stoic, moral failure can be analyzed as a disorder of reason and judgment; for Paul, the problem is deeper: slavery to Sin, existence in σάρξ, and hostility toward God. The solution is therefore not simply better reasoning but liberation through Christ and transformation by the Spirit.

Kowalski reaches a similar conclusion. While Paul may evoke some associations with Stoic cognitive pneuma, the differences are decisive: the Spirit in Rom 8 creates personal and affective bonds with the Father, Christ, and the community of God's children, and the Spirit does not detach believers from suffering but draws them into Christ-shaped hope (Kowalski 2020, pp. 61–63). Thus, what Paul shares with Stoic discourse is a general cognitive and ethical dimension of πνεῦμα; what distinguishes him is the Christological, relational, ecclesial, and eschatological character of the Spirit.

Moss's interpretation of Aristotle's ethics can help conceptually, though by contrast rather than direct dependence. Aristotle repeatedly distinguishes between virtue, which makes the goal right, and *φρόνησις*, which concerns the things toward the goal (Moss 2011, pp. 204–61). Aristotle's discussion of practical reasoning and moral discernment shows that the *φρον*-word group may carry ethical and not merely intellectual significance, especially in relation to the formation of virtuous action (Aristotle 2022, *Eth. nic.* 6.5, 1140a24–1140b30). Yet Paul's use in Rom 8 should not be read simply as an adoption of Aristotelian moral psychology. The Pauline contrast between flesh and Spirit is governed by a different theological horizon: the eschatological and pneumatological transformation of the human being by God's Spirit. The Greco-Roman evidence therefore helps establish the broader ethical potential of the vocabulary, while the specific meaning of *φρόνημα* in Romans 8 must be determined by Paul's own argument.

Kristjánsson's contemporary account of *phronesis* as practical wisdom in virtue ethics also helps describe the ethical force of Paul's language. He presents practical wisdom as an integrative capacity for moral discernment rather than mere rule-following (Kristjánsson 2024, pp. 1031–42). Paul's *φρόνημα* likewise moves beyond external compliance. It names a transformed interiority from which obedience becomes possible. Yet again, Paul's account is more specifically pneumatological: the ethical orientation is not cultivated by character training alone but created by the Spirit who gives life.

Recent work on Pauline anthropology and cognition also helps clarify the claim being made here. Susan Grove Eastman has argued that Pauline personhood should not be understood in narrowly individualistic or disembodied terms. In her reading of Rom 5–8, the self is constituted in relation to powers and forms of participation: sin diminishes agency, while life in Christ and the Spirit reconstitutes agency for responsible action before God (Eastman 2013, pp. 93–110; 2017, pp. 85–108, 123–26). This is important for Rom 8 because *φρόνημα* does not refer merely to private thought or interior reflection. It names a person's embodied and relational orientation under the determining agency either of the flesh or of the Spirit.

This point also resonates with the apocalyptic reading of Romans 5–8 represented in Beverly Roberts Gaventa's work and in the essays collected in *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5–8*. In that framework, Rom 8 is not simply an account of moral improvement, but part of Paul's larger narration of God's liberating action in Christ and the Spirit (Gaventa 2013a). Gaventa's reading of Rom 7, for example, places the human "I" within a larger drama of bondage and divine deliverance, while Eastman's essay in the same volume emphasizes the reconstitution of agency in the dominion of grace (Gaventa 2013b, pp. 77–91; Eastman 2013, pp. 93–110). The contrast between *τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός* and *τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος* therefore belongs within a cosmic and anthropological drama: human cognition is not neutral, but is captured, redirected, and transformed by the power under which one lives.

Samuli Siikavirta's study of baptism and cognition in Rom 6–8 further confirms that Paul's ethical argument in these chapters cannot be reduced to a simple indicative-imperative scheme. For Siikavirta, Rom 6–8 presents cognition as behavior-shaping and embodied; the believer's new existence in Christ involves a transformed way of perceiving and living (Siikavirta 2015, pp. 171–78). This supports the present argument that *τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος* is not merely an inner mental state, but a Spirit-shaped orientation that becomes operative in bodily existence and moral practice.

7. Rom 8:27 and the *φρόνημα* of the Spirit

The fourth occurrence of *φρόνημα* appears in Rom 8:27: ὁ δὲ ἐραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας οἶδεν τί τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος, ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἁγίων. "And the

One who searches hearts knows the Spirit's intention, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God". This verse is decisive because *φρόνημα* is now predicated not of flesh or of the believer's Spirit-shaped orientation, but of the Spirit himself. God knows τὸ *φρόνημα* τοῦ πνεύματος because the Spirit intercedes κατὰ θεόν, according to God.

Romans 8:27 prevents a purely anthropological reading of *φρόνημα*. The Spirit has his own *φρόνημα*—his own divine intention, concern, and direction—and the believer's Spirit-shaped *φρόνημα* participates in that divine orientation. The Spirit not only gives believers a new mindset; the Spirit carries them into the will of God when their own knowledge collapses. The immediate context emphasizes precisely this weakness: "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26). Human incapacity becomes the place where the Spirit's intention acts.

Kowalski interprets Rom 8:26–27 as another cognitive dilemma of believers: they do not know how to pray, and the Spirit intercedes for them with sighs too deep for words; the Father knows the *φρόνημα* or intention of the Spirit, who intercedes according to God's will (Kowalski 2020, pp. 56–57). He further suggests that the Spirit's *φρόνημα* transforms the suffering of believers into deeper communion with the Father and the Son (Kowalski 2020, pp. 56–57). This reading is crucial. The Spirit's *φρόνημα* is not merely cognitive but intercessory, relational, and salvific.

Kowalski's "brokerage" model illuminates the same point from a sociocultural angle. He argues that the Spirit in Rom 8 functions as a mediator of divine gifts, communicating between God and believers, liberating them, empowering them, interceding for them, and securing their future resurrection (Kowalski 2018, pp. 636–54). In this model, the Spirit remains with believers in their weakness and communicates with the divine realm on their behalf. The Spirit's *φρόνημα* is therefore the divine orientation of the Spirit toward the saints, aligning their weakness with God's salvific purpose.

This has major implications for the article's thesis. The *φρόνημα* τοῦ πνεύματος in Rom 8:6 is not simply the believer's religious attitude. It is grounded in the Spirit's own orientation in Rom 8:27. Christian *φρόνημα* is derivative and participatory: the believer comes to share, by grace, the Spirit's own Godward direction. This explains why the *φρόνημα* τοῦ πνεύματος is "life and peace". It participates in the Spirit's own communion with God.

Romans 8:18–30 shows what Spirit-shaped *φρόνημα* looks like under suffering. Paul does not move from *φρόνημα* to triumphalism. He moves from *φρόνημα* to groaning, patience, intercession, and hope. The Spirit-shaped person is not removed from creation's pain; rather, the person becomes more deeply attuned to the tension between present suffering and future glory.

Gieniusz's work on Rom 8:18–30 is important here. He argues that Paul's purpose in this section is to show that present suffering does not thwart future glory (Gieniusz 1999). Kowalski, drawing on Gieniusz, notes that Rom 8:18 responds to the dilemma of whether suffering might indicate divine punishment; Paul argues instead that hardship does not abolish the perspective of inheritance but becomes an occasion for deeper assimilation to Christ (Kowalski 2022, pp. 516–17; Gieniusz 1999, pp. 110–11, 160–61). Thus, suffering is reinterpreted within the Spirit's eschatological work.

The Spirit does not remove believers from suffering but gives suffering a new orientation. The first fruits of the Spirit intensify believers' groaning because they make them more deeply aware of the tension between present suffering and promised glory (Kowalski 2020, pp. 61–62; Gieniusz 1999, pp. 187–210). Yet, in light of L. Ann Jervis's understanding of Pauline temporality, this tension should not be understood simply as life within an overlap of two ages. From the perspective of human time, "already" and "not yet" describe the

believer's experience; but for Paul, those who are in Christ live already in the one time of the risen and exalted Christ.

This sheds light on *φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος*. It is not merely a spiritual attitude toward the future, nor only an anticipation of salvation to come, but the Spirit-formed orientation of those who participate already now in Christ's risen life. Romans 8:23–25 confirms this: those who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as they await the redemption of the body. Their groaning is not a sign of contradiction between present suffering and future glory, but the expression of a life already claimed by the Spirit while still awaiting bodily redemption. Thus, *φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος* is eschatological in a Christological sense: it perceives the present as travail and expectation because it is lived from within Christ's time, where the future glory of God is already active through the Spirit (Jervis 2023, pp. 57, 61, 71, 74, 77, 115, 133).

8. Φρόνημα as Ethical Orientation

The ethical significance of *φρόνημα* is now clear. Paul's ethics in Rom 8 does not begin with command but with transformation. The believer does not obey in order to acquire the Spirit; the believer obeys because the Spirit has created a new orientation. The indicative precedes and grounds the imperative. Rom 8:12–13 still contains a strong imperative logic: believers are debtors, not to the flesh, and they must put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit. Yet this command is grounded in a new identity: they are led by the Spirit and are children of God (Rom 8:14–17). Moreover, *φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος* creates ethical obligation, but not as a new slavery. Paul does not say “debtors to the Spirit” because life in the Spirit is not another debt-system parallel to slavery under *σάρξ*. It is the moral shape of adoption and sonship (Gieniusz 2013; 61–72).

This means that Pauline ethics is neither legalism nor spontaneity. It is not legalism, because conduct flows from the Spirit's gift and indwelling presence. It is not spontaneity, because the Spirit-shaped life involves concrete struggle, discernment, and mortification of the deeds of the body. *φρόνημα* names the inner orientation from which this ethical life becomes intelligible. The Spirit does not bypass the person; the Spirit reorients the person.

Horrell's account of Pauline ethics helps prevent an individualistic interpretation of this claim. He argues that Pauline ethics is shaped by metanorms such as solidarity in Christ and Christ-like other-regard, grounded in identity with Christ and expressed in communal practice (Horrell 2016, pp. 301–9). This complements Rom 8. The Spirit-shaped *φρόνημα* is not private piety. It creates a communal ethos: children of God, siblings with Christ, co-heirs, sufferers together, and those who wait together for redemption.

Moreno García's work is directly relevant because it connects *φρόνημα/φρονέω* in Rom 8:5–8 and Philippians 2:1–5 under the theme *sentir en Cristo*—to feel, think, or be disposed in Christ (Moreno García 1995). This connection is valuable. Rom 8 shows the Spirit-shaped orientation; Phil 2 shows its Christological form: humility, self-giving, obedience, and communion. The *φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος* is therefore not an abstract spiritual state. It takes the form of Christ.

A final theological extension may be made carefully. The Orthodox and patristic language of *φρόνημα ἐκκλησίας*—the mind or ethos of the Church—should not be imposed anachronistically onto Paul, but it can show the reception-historical potential of Rom 8. Tănase argues that patristic interpretation does not treat Scripture as information alone but as participation, communion, and praxis under the work of the Spirit, who continues to guide the reader into the life of the Word (Tănase 2016, pp. 147–79). This resonates with Rom 8. The Spirit's *φρόνημα* is not abstract doctrine alone; it becomes lived orientation. The Word is internalized, prayer is transformed, suffering is interpreted within hope, and the believer is formed into the likeness of Christ.

9. Conclusions

The term φρόνημα in Rom 8 offers a rich anthropological, ethical, and pneumatological category. It cannot be reduced to “mindset”, if the term mindset means only a pattern of thought. In Paul’s argument, φρόνημα is the settled orientation of the human person under a ruling power. The φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός is death because it belongs to the old dominion of Sin, hostility, and incapacity before God. The φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος is life and peace because it participates in the Spirit’s own Godward intention.

Romans 8:27 deepens the claim. God knows τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος because the Spirit intercedes according to God. Therefore, the believer’s Spirit-shaped φρόνημα is not a self-generated moral improvement, but a participation in the Spirit’s own orientation toward the Father, through Christ, in hope of glory. The Spirit reorders perception, desire, obedience, prayer, suffering, and hope.

Such reading allows φρόνημα to function as a central category for Pauline moral formation. Christian ethics flows from Spirit-created orientation; Christian prayer is sustained by the Spirit’s intercession; Christian suffering is reinterpreted by eschatological hope; and Christian identity is formed as participation in Christ. Thus, φρόνημα names the deep structure of the transformed person: not merely thinking differently, but being reoriented toward God in life, peace, obedience, groaning, and glory.

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