

# INTRODUCTION AND ROMANS

By Ashby L. Camp

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The outline of the text is based largely on the analysis presented in Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

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## Introduction

### *I. General Remarks*

A. Romans has played a profound role in church history. The book was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine, the influential theologian of the late fourth and early 5th centuries, and it played a major role in the Protestant Reformation. Frederic Godet, an NT scholar from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in his commentary on Romans that "the Reformation was undoubtedly the work of the Epistle to the Romans, as well as of that to the Galatians."<sup>1</sup>

B. Indeed, Romans played a pivotal role in the life of Martin Luther, a Catholic priest who was one of the leading voices of the Reformation. It was with regard to insight he received while studying Romans that he wrote, "I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates." Romans likewise had a profound effect on the English reformer William Tyndale and on John Calvin, a Frenchman who led the Reformation in Geneva.

C. Modern scholars and expositors are effusive in their praise of the book. They call it "the cathedral of the Christian faith" and describe it as one of "the most important pieces of literature in the intellectual history of Western man." To study Romans is to study one of the deepest and richest

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977 [reprint]), 1.

revelations of God. If we are not blessed through this study, the fault lies with you or me or both of us but certainly not with the Book of Romans.

## *II. Authorship*

A. Romans was written by the Apostle Paul (1:1) through the hand of Tertius (16:22), Paul's amanuensis or scribe (secretary). We know nothing else about Tertius, as this is the only time his name occurs in the New Testament. Ancient authors gave their scribes varying degrees of responsibility in the composition of their works. Since the language and style of Romans is very similar to Paul's other letters, and since there is no evidence that Tertius was involved with those letters, it makes more sense to think Paul pretty much dictated Romans to Tertius.

B. Clearly Paul is the author, so even if Tertius contributed to the wording, the letter is Paul's by approval and adoption. In that case, the process of divine inspiration incorporated Tertius's input. Note that Tertius included a personal greeting to the readers (16:22), which could mean he knew some of them, or perhaps he just felt a bond with them as fellow Christians.

## *III. Date*

A. Romans was written as Paul was concluding his third missionary journey. He was on his way to Jerusalem (15:25) at a time when he felt his missionary work in the eastern provinces had been completed (15:23). He was taking to Jerusalem the collection from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor among the saints (15:25-27). This corresponds with Acts 24:17 where, after completing his third missionary journey, Paul says he arrived in Jerusalem with gifts for the poor. After delivering the gift to the saints in Jerusalem, he was planning to head for Spain and to visit Rome on the way (15:23-24, 28).

B. Paul wrote the letter from Corinth. That is indicated by several lines of evidence. In Rom. 16:1-2, he commends Phoebe, the servant of the church in Cenchrea, which was Corinth's eastern port (she may have been carrying the letter). In 16:23, he gives a greeting from Gaius in whose house he is staying. We know from 1 Cor. 1:14 that one of the Christians in Corinth was named Gaius. In 16:23, he also has a greeting from Erastus, who in the later letter of 2 Timothy (4:20) is said to have stayed in Corinth. Paul describes him as the "treasurer" (*oikonomos*) of the city, and a Latin inscription has been found in Corinth referring to Erastus as "aedile" (commissioner of public works) of the city. The Greek term may be broad enough to refer to the Latin office "aedile," or Erastus may have moved up to that office after Romans was written. Romans 16:21 has greetings from Timothy and Sosipater, both of whom are included in Acts 20:4 as being with Paul when he left Greece in route to Jerusalem (Sosipater being a shortened form of Sosthenes).

C. All of this fits with Acts 20:2-3 as the time of the writing. Paul is there concluding his third missionary journey and is staying in Greece for three months, which almost certainly means Corinth. It was the capital of the province, and he had a deep connection with the church there.

D. Acts 20:2-3 can be dated from Acts 18:12, which has Paul in Corinth "[w]hile Gallio was proconsul of Achaia," and an inscription at Delphi from which one can calculate that Gallio held that office from the last half of A.D. 51 through the first half of 52. Working forward to Acts 20:2-3 gives an approximate date of A.D. 57, though some would date it a year earlier or later.

E. This date falls within what is known as "the five-year period of Nero," the first five years of Nero's reign as emperor, between 54 and 59.

1. Barry Smith states, "This period in Roman history was considered the best period of the Roman Empire since the time of Augustus, unlike the latter part of Nero's reign (when the church was persecuted). This may explain why Paul makes no reference to any problems between the Roman believers and the civil authorities."<sup>2</sup>

2. Though Nero was not yet persecuting Christians, his gross immorality was on display. Andreas Köstenberger, Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles write:

Even early in his reign, however, the emperor was known to "practice every kind of obscenity." Suetonius described in vivid detail Nero's sins with mistresses and prostitutes and his unthinkable perversion. Nero raped one of Rome's Vestal Virgins [priestesses of the goddess Vesta]. He emasculated [castrated] and then publicly wed a boy named Sporus. Rome joked that the world would have been a happier place if Nero's father had married such a wife. Nero made himself the bride of his freedman Doryphorus. This was Rome's noble leader, and his conduct was undoubtedly a reflection, though perhaps an exaggerated one, of the immoral culture in which he lived.<sup>3</sup>

#### *IV. Church at Rome*

##### A. Its founding

1. We do not know when or by whom the church in Rome was founded. Paul had not yet been to Rome (1:10, 13, 15:22). Peter is very unlikely because he was still in Jerusalem at the time of Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and there is evidence the church was in Rome by that time (Emperor Claudius's expulsion of Jews over disruption instigated by "Chrestus" was in A.D. 49). Moreover, it is impossible to think that Paul, who in 15:20 states that he will "not build on another person's

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Smith, "[Introducing the New Testament: A Workbook – The Letter to the Romans](#)."

<sup>3</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 519-520.

foundation," would have written this letter or planned the kind of visit he describes in 1:8-15 to a church that was founded by Peter.

2. Though certainly debated, a reasonable scenario for the founding of the church in Rome is that Jews, who were converted on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10), brought their faith in Jesus back with them to their home synagogues. This squares with the assessment of the fourth-century church leader Ambrosiaster who wrote that the Romans "have embraced the faith of Christ, albeit according to the Jewish rite, without seeing any sign of mighty works or any of the apostles."<sup>4</sup>

## B. Its composition

1. There were both Jewish and Gentile elements in the church at Rome. It seems likely, however, that the Gentile Christians were in a majority that was large enough to justify Paul including the Christian community in Rome within the sphere of those Gentiles to whom his apostleship was especially directed (1:5-6, 13; 15:15-16).

2. If Christianity in Rome began among the Jews, how could this shift to a Gentile majority have occurred? What may have happened is that "God fearers," Gentiles who were interested in Judaism and attended the synagogue without becoming Jews, were the first Gentiles to be attracted to the faith. This would be in keeping with the pattern of Paul's mission. This shift would have been accelerated by Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome in A.D. 49.

a. Roman historian Suetonius (A.D. 69-140) reports that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of "Chrestus." Most scholars agree that "Chrestus" is a misspelling of the Greek "Christos" and that the reference is probably to disputes within the Jewish community over the claims of Jesus to be "Christos," the Messiah. This expulsion is referred to in Acts 18:2 (Priscilla and Aquila expelled). Roman authorities would not have distinguished between Jews and Jewish Christians, so the Gentile element of the Christian community would have come to prominence with the eviction of many of its Jews.

b. As with similar expulsions of specific groups from Rome, this one did not stay in force long. Soon after Claudius's death in A.D. 54, Jews, like Priscilla and Aquila (16:3), were able to return. Jewish Christians who returned would probably be in a minority and were perhaps viewed with some condescension by the now-dominant Gentile wing.

## V. Purpose of Letter

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, NICNT, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 4.

A. The general circumstance of the writing is that Paul had completed his pioneer missionary work in the east and now, after delivering the collections, was planning to go to Spain to preach. He hoped to visit Rome and then continue on his way west with their blessing, interest, and support. It is thus perfectly natural that he would write to the church in Rome.

B. What is harder to understand is why Paul writes the things he writes. How is the content, which is so deeply theological, related to his purpose in writing? There are probably several reasons behind his writing of this letter.

1. The place and relationship of Jews and Gentiles within Christianity was a "hot" issue among Christians outside of Rome, and there is no reason to think the Christians in Rome were isolated from that debate. Paul had battled Judaizers in Galatia and Corinth and was concerned as he wrote Romans about how the gift from the Gentile churches would be received in Jerusalem (15:25-31).

2. Paul wanted to secure a missionary base for his work in Spain, so he wanted the Roman Christians to know the truth about the gospel he preached. For some Jewish Christians, he needed (or may have thought he needed) to correct a false impression that his gospel was anti-law or perhaps even anti-Jewish (3:8). At the same time, he needed to change the thinking of those Jewish Christians who overemphasized the law and their Jewish prerogatives and to change the thinking of those Gentile Christians who tended to scorn everything Jewish. In other words, he wanted to unite Jew and Gentile around the truth of the gospel that they might as one support his work in Spain. He no doubt heard things about the church in Rome that influenced the kind of instruction he provided.

3. But perhaps most importantly,<sup>5</sup> Paul views the predominantly Gentile church in Rome as being among those to whom his apostleship was especially directed (1:5-6, 13; 15:15-16). As he says in 15:15-16, he writes the things he does because in his role as a minister among the Gentiles, he wants them to be an acceptable offering to God, meaning he wants them to be grounded in the truth of the gospel. In their specific context, that required him to address the particular matters about which he wrote, which would also serve his interest in securing a missionary base for his work in Spain.

## Text

### *I. Opening (1:1-17)*

#### A. Salutation (1:1-7)

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<sup>5</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 10-11.

**Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, having been set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup>concerning his Son, who came from the seed of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who was appointed Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness from the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>5</sup>Through him we received grace and apostleship for [bringing about] the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, <sup>6</sup>among whom you also are, those called to belong to Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>To all the beloved of God who are in Rome, those called to be saints: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. Paul refers to himself as a servant (slave) of Christ Jesus, one who has been specially called by God to serve in the cause of God's gospel. He *is* on a mission from God – to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus and the consequent amnesty and liberation that men and women may enjoy through faith in him.

2. This gospel, which concerns God's Son Jesus, was promised in advance through the prophets in the OT. These "prophets" include men like Moses (Acts 3:21-23) and David (Acts 2:30), as well as those we would ordinarily classify as "prophets" per se. In 3:21 Paul insists that the law and prophets testify to the righteousness made known through the gospel, and in 16:26 he says the gospel had been made known through the prophetic scriptures. There is continuity between the OT and NT; the gospel is foreshadowed in the OT.

3. There is a parallel structure in vv. 3-4 that some translations obscure. In these verses Paul may well be quoting or drawing upon an early Christian creed to summarize the content of the gospel of God mentioned in v. 1.

Concerning his Son,  
Who came  
    *From* the seed of David  
    *According to* the flesh  
Who was appointed Son of God in power  
    *According to* the Spirit of holiness  
    *From* the resurrection from the dead  
Jesus Christ our Lord

4. The preexistent Son of God came into human existence in the lineage of David. In Rom. 15:12 Paul applies to Jesus Isaiah's statement that "He will be the shoot of Jesse," and in 2 Tim. 2:8 he again describes Jesus as "from the seed of David."

a. This is a clear reference to the fact Jesus is the awaited Messiah. The promise to David that his seed would have eternal reign (2 Sam. 7:12-16) became the prime focus of messianic expectation in the OT (e.g., Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5-6, 30:9, 33:14-18; Ezek. 34:23-24,

37:24-25) and in Judaism (e.g., Jn. 7:42; Mat. 9:27). That Jesus was the fulfillment of this promise is all over the NT (Mat. 1:1-16; Lk. 1:27, 32, 69; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5, 22:16).

b. As an aside, the fact some who were not from David's line temporarily ruled Israel is not contrary to God's promise to David because, as 2 Sam. 7 and Psalm 89 make clear, the promise contained a punitive clause. If David's children rebelled against God, they would be punished. This punishment could result in a temporary Davidic vacancy, but the *right to rule* would always remain with David's line.

5. The eternal Son of God, Jesus the Christ, was *appointed* (same word translated "appointed" in Acts 10:42 and 17:31) "Son of God in power" *from* (ἐκ) the resurrection, meaning at the time of or on the basis of the resurrection. In other words, before the resurrection he was the Son of God in the weakness and lowliness of his earthly existence. At the resurrection and related ascension, he entered a new phase of his messianic career that is described as "Son of God in power."

a. Paul indicated the same thing in Acts 13:30-33 when he applied the statement in Ps. 2:7, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you," to God's raising Jesus from the dead.

(1) Psalm 2:7 historically referred to God becoming the father of the earthly Davidic king (his metaphorical "begetting" of him) when that king was formally and publicly installed on the throne.<sup>6</sup> The king became God's son at that time in the sense he then assumed a new God-appointed role of ruler. By applying that verse to Jesus' resurrection, Paul was indicating that the resurrection was where Jesus assumed a new God-appointed role of Israel's *ultimate* king, the supremely powerful Lord of lords.

(2) Jesus was, of course, the unique Son of God from his divine conception (e.g., Lk. 1:35 [Gabriel's words to Mary], 3:22 [announcement at Jesus' baptism]). But in his resurrection and associated ascension he, as the God-man Jesus, became God's Son in the sense of Ps. 2:7, meaning that he was enthroned at that time, exalted to a new stage or phase of his messianic career.

b. This change in Jesus' role from his resurrection is also indicated in Phil. 2:5-11. Paul says there that the Son chose to forego certain prerogatives of his divinity in obedience to the will of the Father, only to have bestowed on him through his faithfulness the supremely powerful position of Lord of lords. Again, with the resurrection and its associated ascension, Jesus entered a new state or stage of his messianic career; he was exalted to a new position. Ben Witherington remarks:

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<sup>6</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 61. And as Craig S. Keener notes in *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2:2070, it was widely understood in the first century to include a reference to the Messiah, the ultimate Anointed One (the meaning of Messiah).

v. 4 is not about what Christ is according to this divine nature but rather about what happened to Jesus at the resurrection, when God's Spirit raised him from the dead and designated or marked him out as Son of God in power. . . . Paul means here that at the resurrection Jesus enters a phase of his career where he becomes Son of God *in power*. Previously, he was Son of God in weakness. He did not assume the role of glorified and exalted and all-powerful Lord until after the resurrection (so also Philippians 2), when he was appointed to such a role.<sup>7</sup>

6. Whereas Jesus' birth in David's lineage was "according to" or "in relation to" *the flesh*, his resurrection-based appointment as Son of God in power was "in relation to" *the Spirit of holiness*.

a. His human birth was related to the flesh, not just that it involved human flesh but that it came about in the old order of reality that is passing away, the realm of the flesh. His exaltation, on the other hand, was related to the Spirit of holiness in that it was related to the coming of the new order of reality that is characterized by the holiness and purifying that are the work of the Spirit. Moo remarks, "The contrast of 'flesh' and 'Spirit' is part of Paul's larger salvation-historical framework, in which two 'aeons' or eras are set over against one another: the old era, dominated by sin, death, and the flesh, and the new era, characterized by righteousness, life, and the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>8</sup>

b. With Jesus' resurrection and his associated ascension and outpouring of the Spirit, the launching or inaugurating of the kingdom of God was completed. With that, God's revolution, his transformation (or "heavenization") of this reality, this fallen creation, was fully underway. That kingdom that was inaugurated at Jesus' first coming will be finalized or consummated at his return. The kingdom of God, the heavenly, has invaded this reality, has been pulled into the present, but until the Lord's return, it coexists with the old age that is characterized by things contrary to God's ultimate purpose, things like sin, death, mourning, crying, and pain. All of those things will be stripped out when Jesus returns, and the kingdom of God, the divine utopia, will be the sole reality extending into eternity.

c. Here is how Richard Bauckham expresses it:

In New Testament scholarship a broad consensus emerged . . . [regarding] a position sometimes labeled 'inaugurated' eschatology. There is a tension between the 'already' of experience and the 'not yet' of eschatological fulfillment. The realization of God's final purpose for the world has already begun in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but its completion is still awaited. Believers live in the overlap of the old and new ages, between the resurrection of Jesus understood as an eschatological event and their own bodily resurrection at the future *parousia* of Jesus, participating

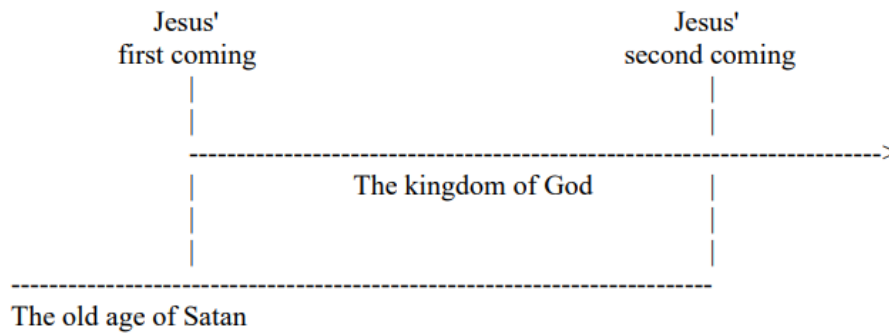
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<sup>7</sup> Ben Witherington III (with Darlene Hyatt), *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Moo (2018), 48.

through the Spirit in the new life of the age to come but in the context of the as yet unredeemed world.<sup>9</sup>

d. Here is a visual depiction of the concept that I have often used:



7. Paul (and anyone else similarly called) received the special gift of being an apostle for the purpose of bringing about the "obedience of faith" among all the Gentiles.

a. "Obedience of faith" speaks of true conversion to Jesus Christ. As Douglas Moo remarks:

[W]e understand the words "obedience" and "faith" to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. . . . Faith and obedience should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of the Christian experience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience – for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord – and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith – for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith.<sup>10</sup>

b. Paul's particular call was to minister to Gentiles in distinction from Jews (see, Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7). This does not mean he was meant to preach *exclusively* to Gentiles, just *primarily* to them (see, e.g., Acts 9:15). This ministering was done for "the sake of his name," meaning for the glory and praise of Jesus Christ.

8. I believe, with many commentators,<sup>11</sup> that v. 6 is best punctuated "among whom you also are, those called to belong to [*lit.* "of"] Jesus Christ." The Roman Christians are included in the category of people to whom Paul was especially sent, meaning they are predominantly Gentiles,

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology" in John Webster and others, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 307.

<sup>10</sup> Moo (2018), 50-51.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Moo (2018), 52.

and as such, there should be no question as to his authority regarding them. These (predominantly) Gentiles have responded to God's call to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus.

9. Paul describes the Roman Christians as "the beloved of God who are in Rome, those called to be saints." God loves all people, but he has a special love for those who open their hearts to respond to his call (e.g., Jn. 14:21). Christians are "saints," which means "holy ones." We have been "set apart" in a special relationship with God. We have been separated from the "dominion of darkness" (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9) and from "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), and we have been placed by God's grace within his kingdom (Col. 1:13) and family (2 Cor. 6:17-18). We are saints, and therefore we should live like it.

10. Paul ends v. 7 with "grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." David Garland remarks:

Paul modifies the traditional Greek salutation by changing the Greek *charein* ('greetings'; cf. Acts 15:23; 23:26; Jas 1:1) to the similar sounding *charis* (*grace*) and adding the Semitic *peace*. Grace through Christ is God's response to sin (5:20). It results in peace between God and reconciled sinners, and peace of mind (8:6) in the security of God's acceptance. It also results in peace in their midst because they are cemented together by their common bond to *our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.<sup>12</sup>

## B. Thanksgiving and Occasion (1:8-15)

**<sup>8</sup>First, I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ concerning all of you because your faith is being proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup>For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how constantly I make mention of you, <sup>10</sup>always in my prayers asking if somehow now at last I will be given, by God's will, an open road to come to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened, <sup>12</sup>or rather to be encouraged together with you through each other's faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup>I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that often I purposed to come to you (yet I was hindered up till now) so that I might have some fruit even among you, as also among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup>To both Greeks and barbarians, to both wise and foolish, I am a debtor, <sup>15</sup>hence my eagerness to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.**

1. Paul gives thanks to God for all the Roman Christians. He is aware of them because their existence was reported in the Christian communities throughout the "world." This is hyperbole, an exaggeration designed to emphasize how widely the news that the church was in Rome had spread, no doubt facilitated by Claudius's expulsion of Jews for rioting at the instigation

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<sup>12</sup> David E. Garland, *Romans*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2021), 52.

of "Chrestos." The fact Jesus was acknowledged as Lord even in Rome, the capital of the empire, was big news among the saints.

2. Paul, who wholeheartedly serves God in the preaching of the gospel of Christ, regularly mentions them in his prayers, asking that God will give him an open road to come to them. He longs to see them that he might impart to them some gift or blessing from the Spirit that would strengthen them, probably meaning that he desired to exercise among them some Spirit-given insight or ability that was tailored to specific needs he observed when in Rome. (For now, however, he must be content to bless them from afar through his letter.) Paul recognized that their faith also would be an encouragement to him.

a. As a footnote, I was struck some years ago by the way in which God granted Paul's prayer to come to Rome. Let us just say that I doubt it was what Paul had in mind. After writing that he had been praying regularly for God to give him an open road to come to Rome, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, avoided a plot to kill him, spent two years in prison in Caesarea and then was shipwrecked on the way to Rome.

b. This helps me to appreciate how God's working often is beyond my very limited vision. I want the Lord just to transport me to Rome right now, but he has other things in mind.

3. Paul wants them to know that he had often intended to visit them but had so far been kept from doing so, probably by more pressing responsibilities. He had wanted to visit that he might "have some fruit among them," as he had among the rest of the Gentiles. I think Paul here is saying, at least primarily, that he wanted to visit that he might convert Gentiles from within the larger community, but he also wanted to strengthen the faith of those who had already converted.

4. He feels a sense of *obligation* to all Gentiles: those with Greek language and culture and those without, those who were accomplished intellectually and those who were not. It is that sense of obligation that explains his eagerness to preach the gospel to those in Rome. If Roman *Christians* are the referent or are included in the phrase "you who are in Rome," then "the gospel" that Paul is eager to preach goes beyond the message of Christ's saving work to teaching that builds on the initial evangelization.

### C. Theme of the Letter (1:16-17)

**<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew first and to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is being revealed, [a righteousness] from faith to faith, just as it is written, "But the righteous by faith shall live."**

1. Some apparently saw Paul's absence from Rome as an indication that he was ashamed of the gospel he preached (or he was concerned they might see it that way). Maybe they thought he was embarrassed to preach it in such a sophisticated city. As Paul noted in 1 Cor. 1:23, Christ crucified is "foolishness" to Gentiles.

a. Martin Hengel expressed this perspective in his little book *Crucifixion*: "[T]o believe that the one pre-existent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee, as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness."<sup>13</sup>

b. The resurrection, which is the rest of Christ's crucifixion story, was considered absurd. Recall that the philosophers in Athens called Paul a "babbler" in Acts 17:18 and sneered at him in 17:32 for preaching the resurrection.

2. Or maybe they thought Paul was embarrassed to preach the gospel in a Christian community where elements suspected it was anti-law or anti-Jewish. That would be a tough argument to make in light of the old-covenant Scriptures, so maybe some thought Paul was unwilling to face close questioning on those particular issues.

3. Whatever lay behind the suspicion (or possible suspicion) that Paul's absence from Rome reflected a sense of shame or intellectual intimidation regarding the gospel, Paul flatly declares that he is *not* ashamed of the gospel he preaches. And the reason he is not ashamed of that gospel, the true gospel, is that, however it may appear to the world, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew (first) and to the Gentile (Greek).

a. God's saving power is exercised through the message of His saving work in Christ. That message, which was given by God, is the seed through which lost humanity receives the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

b. This salvation, however, is only for those who believe, for those who in both mind and will surrender themselves to the Christ presented in the gospel. Saving faith is more than mental assent, more than simply believing that something is true. It is the "yes" of the total person. It includes believing the facts about God's work in Christ, but it also includes surrendering to those facts, a decision to live in accordance with them.

(1) According to Jas. 2:14-26, faith that is mere mental assent is insufficient to receive the gift of salvation. That is why Paul referred in 1:5 to the "obedience of faith."

(2) This is why Jesus told the parables of the tower-builder and the king going to war in Lk. 14:28-33. We often say at weddings that marriage is not to be entered into

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, trans. by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 6-7.

lightly or unadvisedly. In those parables Jesus makes that point about Christian discipleship. Klyne Snodgrass observes, "Discipleship changes allegiances with family, requires the willingness to die, shifts the focus off self-centeredness, places one at the disposal of another, and changes the way one handles financial resources."<sup>14</sup> Becoming a Christian is a radical, life-changing commitment, not merely an intellectual exercise, and one must weigh whether one is prepared to see it through.

c. Since in the first century faith in Christ invariably was expressed in submission to baptism (e.g., 6:1-4), Paul's failure to mention baptism does not mean that baptism is not part of conversion. It simply was understood that coming to faith included submitting to baptism. If one said that being president is for whoever wins the election, one would not mean that a person could serve as president without being sworn into office. It is understood and assumed that those who win elections are sworn into office.

d. Though salvation is by faith in Christ for both Jew and Gentile, there is a sense in which the Jew has priority over the Gentile. God chose the Jews as the people through whom Christ was brought into the world. So it is not surprising that the gospel was promised in advance to the Jews through the prophets (1:2, 3:2) and that they were the first to have it preached to them by Jesus and the Apostles.

4. The gospel is "the power of God for salvation" for in it the "righteousness of God" is being revealed.

a. When righteousness is attributed to God in the OT, it often has reference to his saving activity. That is the form that his righteousness takes. Garland states, "In the Hebraic tradition, the phrase [the righteousness of God] refers to God's saving activity in history (cf. Ps. 98:1-2)."<sup>15</sup> For example, in Isa. 46:13 God promises through the prophet (ESV): "I bring near my *righteousness*; it is not far off, and my *salvation* will not delay." Ps. 98:1-2 says (ESV), "Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he *has done* marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have *worked salvation* for him." <sup>2</sup> The LORD has *made known his salvation*; he has *revealed his righteousness* in the sight of the nations." See also, Ps. 35:26-28, 40:10, 51:14, 71:15-16, 71:24, 88:12, 119:123; Isa. 51:5-6, 51:8. In this sense, "of God" (θεοῦ) is a subjective genitive, as in the preceding phrases "the power of God" (1:16) and "the wrath of God" (1:18), so that "righteousness of God" refers to the righteousness that is being shown by God in his saving people.<sup>16</sup>

b. In the preaching of the gospel, God's saving action is taking place (being shown or "revealed" in history), and the way it is taking place is through his bestowing a righteous status on those who believe. In other words, the "righteousness of God" that is being revealed in his saving work is bound up with his imputing a righteous status to the saved on the basis of faith. It is

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<sup>14</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 385-386.

<sup>15</sup> Garland (2021), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Moo (2018), 74 (fn. 225).

the act by which God brings people into a right relationship with himself. This saving work of "righteousing" people is, of course, based on the atoning death of Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel.

5. This saving work of God, this rescuing bestowal of righteousness, is "from faith to faith" in that it expands with the spreading of faith; it tracks the expansion of faith because faith is the means of God's saving work. *No one* earns a right relationship with God.

6. Habakkuk 2:4 points out that the righteous conduct themselves by faith in God's character and his word. However things may appear, they trust the Judge of all the earth will do right and do what he says. Paul's inspired use of that text is probably intended to bring out that faith not only sets how the righteous conduct themselves but is the means through which they are made righteous in the first place by the grace of God. Not only is it true that "[the righteous] [by faith shall live]" but also that "[the righteous by faith] [shall live]," meaning live eternally with God and conduct themselves accordingly in the present.

## *II. Justification by Faith (1:18 - 4:25)*

### A. The Universal Reign of Sin (1:18 - 3:20)

#### **1. All persons are accountable to God for sin (1:18-32)**

##### ***a. Humanity's rejection of the revelation of God in nature (1:18-23)***

**<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because what is knowable of God is evident among them, for God displayed it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible [attributes] are clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood by the things made, both his eternal power and deity, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup>because having known God, they did not glorify [him] as God or give [him] thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings and their uncomprehending hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for a likeness of an image of mortal man and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles.**

(1) That God's saving work, his "righteousing" people through faith, is taking place in the preaching of the gospel is of supreme importance *because* ("For") the terrible

wrath of God that ultimately is coming is already being previewed in his wrath upon the ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings.

(2) God's "wrath" is different from human anger.

(a) As John Stott says, "It does not mean that he loses his temper, flies into a rage, or is ever malicious, spiteful, or vindictive. The alternative to 'wrath' is not 'love' but 'neutrality' in the moral conflict. And God is not neutral. On the contrary, his wrath is his holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, his just judgment upon it."<sup>17</sup>

(b) C. E. B. Cranfield remarks, "A man who knows, for example, about the far-reaching injustice and cruelty of *apartheid* and is not angry at such wickedness is not a good man: by his lack of anger he shows his lack of love. God would not be the truly loving God that he is if he did not react to our evil with wrath."<sup>18</sup>

(3) Paul makes the point that the wrath of God against sinners, both as previewed in history and completed on Judgment Day, is just because God has revealed himself to all mankind through the creation. In Thomas Schreiner's words, "God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world."<sup>19</sup> Creation bears witness to God, and yet mankind willfully suppresses that testimony, preferring to go its own foolish way and to create its own gods. Rather than embrace the testimony of creation and give God the glory he is due, humanity culpably buries that truth and substitutes gods of its own making as objects of devotion and reverence. Paul is focusing here on the idolatry of the Gentile world, a world that had a multitude of images that represented their various false gods.

(4) Paul states in v. 18 that God's wrath is now being manifested from heaven against this culpable suppression and substitution, and in v. 24 he explains the form of that wrath.

### ***b. The divine reaction to human rejection (1:24-32)***

**<sup>24</sup>Therefore, God handed them over in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, so that their bodies are dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup>They exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshiped and served the creature instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever, amen. <sup>26</sup>Because of this, God handed them over to dishonorable passions, for both their females exchanged natural sexual relations for those contrary to nature, <sup>27</sup>and likewise also the males, having abandoned natural sexual relations with the female, were inflamed with their**

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<sup>17</sup> John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>18</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 29.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 86.

**desire for one another, males with males carrying out shameful acts and receiving in themselves the penalty that was necessary for their error.<sup>28</sup> And as they did not see fit to keep God in [their] knowledge, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do immoral things,<sup>29</sup> those filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and depravity; full of envy, murder, discord, deceit, and malice; gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> without understanding, without faithfulness, without natural affection, without mercy.<sup>32</sup> They, though knowing God's righteous decree that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but also approve of those who practice [them].**

(1) God's wrath is now being expressed in his having opened the door to sinful humanity's headlong plunge into wickedness. This foretaste of the ultimate wrath is God having "handed over" human beings (vv. 24, 26, 28), having given them over, to their chosen way of sin and all its consequences. It is something like the parent whose effort to bless his child by providing guidance has been despised for so long that he stops locking up his money, which the child then uses to buy heroin and thus to reap his punishment. As Stott says (Americanized spelling), "God abandons stubborn sinners to their willful self-centeredness, and the resulting process of moral and spiritual degeneration is to be understood as a judicial act of God. This is the revelation of God's wrath from heaven."<sup>20</sup> That is what is behind Friedrich Schiller's famous comment, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world."<sup>21</sup> As Michael Gorman puts it:

Paul is not placing the blame on God for human sin but is maintaining that, when we insist on our own way, God allows human folly to run its natural course without preventing its inevitable consequences. In fact, God gives us what we explicitly or implicitly desire: freedom from God. But such freedom from the true Lord means being governed by another lord, either ourselves or some third party. All of this is part of what Paul means when he speaks of the revelation of the wrath of God (1:18, 32).<sup>22</sup>

(2) With God having "handed them over" in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, we see the depths to which humanity sinks. Their lust finds expression in dishonorable passions and in perverse (unnatural), shameful, and dishonoring sexual relations, "Exhibit A" being homosexuality of both females and males. This is a serious sexual sin according to Scripture, being labeled an abomination (Lev. 18:22, 20:13), and it was universally acknowledged as such by Jews and Christians.<sup>23</sup>

(3) Regarding Paul's words about male homosexuality, Garland states:

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<sup>20</sup> Stott (1994), 75.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Moo (2018), 112.

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 85.

<sup>23</sup> On the general subject, see Ashby Camp, "[The Bible and Homosexual Conduct](#)."

Paul's reference to nature, *natural intercourse*, does not refer to an individual's nature but to God's established order of creation. Same-sex intercourse is 'in essence a misuse of God's creation, whatever the personal inclinations of the individual' [quoting France]. Paul does not limit the *shameless* same-sex acts of males only to certain categories of actions, such as pederasty, male prostitution, homosexual promiscuity, heterosexuals performing same-sex acts or the exploitative abuse of slaves. He applies the term to all male same-sex acts ["males with males"]. His point is that perverting the relationship humans are to have with God leads to the perversions of God's intentions for human sexual relationships.<sup>24</sup>

(4) Paul notes with immediate reference to males carrying out shameful sexual acts with other males that they receive in themselves the penalty that was necessary (or due) for their error. "Error" here does not mean an inadvertent mistake but the culpable deviance or delusion of a rebel (e.g., Jas. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:18). Kruse says, "The word translated 'error' carries the idea of 'a thoroughly serious going astray from the truth in thought and/or in conduct.' Throughout Scripture homosexual practice is universally condemned as 'a serious going astray.'"<sup>25</sup> If Paul is speaking specifically of male homosexuals and not citing them as representative of all homosexuals, perhaps the penalty they receive in themselves refers to distinctive physical harms that result from the unnaturalness of their sex acts, the abuse of the body in fulfillment of perverted lust.<sup>26</sup> If he is speaking of all homosexuals, then he probably means that their degrading embrace of sexual perversion is itself the penalty for their "error" in willfully rejecting God.<sup>27</sup>

(5) This does not mean, of course, that homosexuals are beyond God's love and concern. The cross of Christ proves forever the depth of God's love for all mankind. The question is not whether God loves the homosexual but whether the homosexual will love God. One cannot love God and live in defiance of his commandments (Jn. 14:15, 14:21-24, 15:10, 15:14; 1 Jn. 2:3-6, 5:2-3; 2 Jn. 6).

(6) As Christians we must lovingly and patiently call all sinners, including homosexuals, to repentance, celebrate their conversion, and work to mature them and integrate them into the community of faith. Our culture appreciates the nobility of "tough love" in other circumstances, such as in training rebellious teenagers or dealing with alcoholics, but demonizes tough love of homosexuals as "homophobia." The church cannot be intimidated. As Christ loved sinful humanity enough to endure public scorning in order to bless it, so we as his disciples must love homosexuals enough to do the same. Those who come to the light will be forever grateful; those who refuse will realize on "that Day" that we were acting for their good.

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<sup>24</sup> Garland (2021), 79.

<sup>25</sup> Kruse (2012), 104.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 179.

<sup>27</sup> Thus, Schreiner says (1998), 97, "The context suggests that the 'penalty' is not something in addition to homosexuality. The penalty is rather being handed over to the sin of homosexuality itself."

(7) Paul made clear in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 that the church in Corinth included some who *had been* practicing homosexuals. But as he says in v. 11, they were washed, they were sanctified, and they were pronounced righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. Homosexuals are not beyond the transforming power of the Spirit of God. That does not mean that none of them will continue to struggle with temptation in that regard. We all on this side of eternity continue to struggle with some temptations, the particulars of which vary with our distinctive bentness. It means that God is with us in our struggles and cleanses us as we confess our sin and seek him.

(8) Notice that the sinfulness of homosexuality is rooted in the creation account. Verse 20 speaks directly of God's creation, v. 25 refers to God as the Creator, and vv. 26-27 allude to the creation of mankind through the use of the adjectives "male" and "female," as in the creation account, rather than the nouns "man" and "woman." Homosexual conduct is contrary to nature in that it is contrary to God's design of mankind as male and female and his intention for their exclusive coupling. So attempts to restrict Paul's condemnation to exploitative forms of homosexual conduct or to homosexual conduct performed as part of idolatrous worship are groundless rationalizations of sin. As Richard Longenecker observes, "Paul's attitude toward homosexual behavior could hardly be more adversely expressed. For he condemns it totally – as did also all Jews and all Jewish Christians of his day."<sup>28</sup>

(9) Denials to the contrary notwithstanding, humans know at some level that God is God and that he deserves the utmost honor, and despite that knowledge, they continue to rebel against him in all manner of ways and to approve of those who do. They know what they do is wrong and that it deserves condemnation by God. This knowledge is probably due both to the revelation of God through creation and to the "law of the heart" referred to in 2:14-15, the basic moral sense that is implanted within us by virtue of our being made in the image of God. This "general revelation" is sufficient to make all people culpable for disobeying.

(10) In saying that they *not only* do such wicked things *but also* approve of those who do such wicked things, Paul suggests that their *approval* of wrongdoing by others is even more culpable than their own wrongdoing. Cranfield states:

[T]he man who applauds and encourages others in doing what is wicked is, even if he never actually commits the same wicked deed himself, not only as guilty as those who do commit it, but very often more guilty than they. There are several factors involved. . . . To draw attention to the fact [as does the omitted quote from Apollinarius] that the man who does the wrong will often be under great pressure, as for instance that of passion, whereas the man who looks on and applauds will not normally be under any similar pressure, is not at all to diminish the guilt of the doer, but it is to reveal the greater culpability of the applauder. His attitude will very often be the reflection of a settled choice. But there is also the fact that those who condone and applaud the vicious actions of others are actually making a deliberate

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<sup>28</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 217.

contribution to the setting up of a public opinion favorable to vice, and so to the corruption of an indefinite number of other people.<sup>29</sup>

(11) Gorman writes:

In this situation of moral chaos – of people willfully discarding God, suffering the consequences, and all the while applauding (NRSV) or approving of (NAB, NIV) one another (1:32) – the wrath of God is experienced now, in advance, before the actual coming day of judgment and wrath (2:5; cf. 1 Thess 1:9-10). Paul may be reflecting on his own experience; according to Acts, he approved the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1; 22:20). *Evil becomes normal and eventually normative when people (shamefully) endorse it by rewarding or imitating those who practice it.*<sup>30</sup>

(12) Paul's unnamed focus in this section is the Gentiles, but he makes clear in the next section that the Jew really fares no better in this regard. They too are under the power of sin. One can imagine some Gentiles claiming that their ignorance of God exempted them from his judgment, so Paul insists that all people have some knowledge of God and his will for them.

## **2. Jews are accountable to God for Sin (2:1 - 3:8)**

### ***a. The Jews and the judgment of God (2:1-16)***

#### **(1) Critique of Jewish presumption (2:1-5)**

**Therefore, you are without excuse, O man, that is, everyone who judges, for in what you judge the other, you condemn yourself, for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup>Now we know that the judgment of God on those who practice such things is according to truth. <sup>3</sup>So do you think, O man, you who judge those practicing such things while also doing them, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness and forbearance and patience, ignoring [the fact] that God's kindness is trying to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your hardness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment,**

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<sup>29</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1:135.

<sup>30</sup> Gorman (2022), 89.

(a) Paul now turns his attention to the Jews, but he does not name them expressly until v. 17. As Grant Osborne notes, "Greater space and effort go into showing Jewish guilt, for they had too little awareness of their actual position before God. They were the covenant people and therefore, they believed, exempt in some fashion from his wrath. Paul shows that that is not the case."<sup>31</sup> Garland states:

Paul has said that the wrath of God is poured out on 'all ungodliness and wickedness' (1:18). He then sketched the sins of the Gentiles who deliberately reject the revelation of God they have received. He now draws a bead on the Jews in 2:1-29. They also are entrapped by sin's merciless power, and, despite their posturing as God's unassailable elect, they will be subject to God's impartial scrutiny at the judgment. Paul intends to destroy the props that enable Jews to imagine that they could be reckoned righteous before God 'on any basis other than that offered in the gospel: the righteousness of God made accessible through faith' (Byrne, p. 79). They too are guilty of ungodliness (11:26) and wickedness (2:8; 3:5) and therefore also evoke God's wrath. Paul's argument in 2:1-29 headlines two basic principles: God judges all humanity 'in accordance with truth' (2:2), and God will disregard everyone's ancestry and judge each according to his or her obedience to the law – the written law or the law written on their hearts (2:12).<sup>32</sup>

(b) Paul wants the Jews to understand that their being Jews does not give them a "leg up" on Gentiles when it comes to salvation. Yes, Jews kept the knowledge of the truth of God that the Gentiles had rejected, but mere knowledge of the truth does not exempt one from judgment; rather, it shows one to be without excuse for sinning. If the sin of those who *deny* the truth is blameworthy, how much more the sin of those who *acknowledge* the truth by using it to judge others? By condemning in others the things one does, one admits the propriety of one's own condemnation. With the Jew in mind, Paul would be referring to such things (from the list in 1:29-31) as greed, envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, arrogance, unfaithfulness, and lovelessness.

(c) For Jews to think they could sin and be exempt from judgment (by birthright, by being a Jew) is to show contempt for God's mercy, for his abundant kindness and forbearance and patience in withholding the judgment that is rightfully due the sinner. The purpose of that mercy is not to excuse sin but to stimulate repentance (see, 2 Pet. 3:9).

(d) God will not withhold his judgment forever. Judgment Day is coming, and though the Jews (those who kept the knowledge of God) had been spared the foretaste of wrath that was already being revealed in the Gentile world (the "handing over"), they were, by presuming on God's kindness, accumulating wrath in advance of that judgment.

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<sup>31</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 44-45.

<sup>32</sup> Garland (2021), 84; see also, Moo (2018), 136-137.

## (2) The impartiality of judgment (2:6-11)

**<sup>6</sup>who will repay each one according to his works. <sup>7</sup>To those who, by persistence in good work, seek glory and honor and immortality, [he will give] eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but to those who are self-seeking and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness, [he will give] wrath and anger. <sup>9</sup>[There will be] affliction and distress on every human being who carries out what is evil, both Jew first and Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace for everyone who works what is good, both Jew first and Greek, <sup>11</sup>for there is no partiality with God.**

(a) God is not going to judge humanity by a double standard – one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Just as Jews understand that Gentiles will receive wrath and anger because of their sin, they need to understand that the same goes for them. God's judgment for sin is wrath, whereas his judgment for *unfailing* righteousness (or *persistent* good work) is an eternal life of glory, honor, and peace.

(b) I am with those who believe that Paul is here speaking about the condition for salvation apart from Christ. He is establishing the point that, when it comes to salvation, Jews and Gentiles are in the same position. In other words, the ground at the foot of the cross is level *even for Jews and Gentiles*. Without the atoning death of Christ, we are *all* on our own; we stand before God on the basis of our own obedience and righteousness. If anyone was *unfailingly* obedient – that is, was not self-seeking, did not obey unrighteousness, did not carry out what is evil – he would indeed inherit eternal life on that basis. But, as Paul will show, the power of sin is such that no one obeys sufficiently to merit salvation.

(1) Though many disagree, Schreiner says, "Probably the dominant interpretation is that these verses are hypothetical. Eternal life would be given if one did good works and kept the law perfectly, but no one does the requisite good works, and thus all deserve judgment."<sup>33</sup>

(2) Moo comments:

Particularly important is how these verses are read in the larger context of Paul's argument. We must remember that Paul in this context is arguing for universal sin as the basis of universal need. All have sinned. Sin is so pervasive and powerful that no one can be considered "right" with God by what they do (3:20); therefore all need to embrace Christ for salvation. As one step in this argument, it makes perfect sense if Paul in vv. 6-11 is trying to establish the principle that God will judge every person on the same basis – by works, not by religious heritage or national identity. By citing his "Jew first, then Gentile" aphorism twice, Paul reveals that his focus remains on the need to undercut the Jewish assumption of protection from judgment

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<sup>33</sup> Schreiner (1998), 114.

through their national identity. If the "Gentile" here is a Christian, this "leveling-the-playing-field" argument does not work well.<sup>34</sup>

(c) Merely being a Jew, merely having that religious heritage or national identity, provides no protection in terms of judgment. Jews, as much as Gentiles, must be in Christ or their works will condemn them.

(d) If I may digress briefly, of course faithful Jews before the coming of Christ received the benefits of his atoning death prospectively. Forgiveness was provided in the sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant – e.g., Lev. 4:31, 6:1-7, 17:11 – but these repeated sacrifices were only a shadow of the true atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the sacrifice on which all divine forgiveness is based (Heb. 10:1-14). With Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, the page in salvation history has turned. The old covenant, having served its purpose, has become obsolete (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15 - 4:7; Eph. 2:11-22; Heb. 8:7-13), so its sacrifices are no longer recognized. The reality has displaced the shadow; the new covenant has replaced the old.

### (3) Judgment and the law (2:12-16)

**<sup>12</sup>For as many as sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and as many as sinned with the law will be judged through the law, <sup>13</sup>for not the hearers of the law will be righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be pronounced righteous. <sup>14</sup>For whenever Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things of the law, these not having the law are a law to themselves. <sup>15</sup>They show the work of the law written in their hearts, as their consciences and commonly held thoughts also testify, accusing or even defending <sup>16</sup>on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secret things of people through Christ Jesus.**

(a) Garland states:

This unit [vv. 12-16] expands on the statement that God shows no favoritism and spells out why. Those who have sinned without the law will perish. Those who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law (2:12). What Paul leaves unsaid but assumes is that the law is an exacting taskmaster: 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law' (Gal. 3:10; cf. Deut. 27:26). He is building up to his conclusion that all have sinned (3:23), and all will be held responsible before God for their sin (3:19). Disobedience leads to death and destruction.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Moo (2018), 152-153.

<sup>35</sup> Garland (2021), 97.

(b) The fact the Jews possess the law of Moses, those commandments given by God through Moses to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, does not distinguish them from Gentiles when it comes to salvation. In terms of salvation, it is not merely hearing or possessing the law that matters, it is obeying it.

(c) Further, even Gentiles who do not have God's law in written form, the Mosaic law, are not without any "law." Gentiles have some knowledge of God's moral demands – "law" in the generic sense. They have some implanted sense of right and wrong, so they are responsible for basic moral standards. They reveal the presence of this standard when they do such things as obey parents, refrain from murder and robbery, etc. Their individual consciences and the consensus of their community regarding the standard also testify to its existence. That standard, their "own law" (law to themselves), is the standard by which they will be accused or even defended on that Day, and it will be applied to even the secret things.

### ***b. The limitations of the covenant (2:17-29)***

#### **(1) The law (2:17-24)**

**<sup>17</sup>But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast in God <sup>18</sup>and know the will [of God] and ascertain the things that really matter, being instructed from the law, <sup>19</sup>and are convinced you are a guide for the blind, a light for those in darkness, <sup>20</sup>a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of infants, having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law - <sup>21</sup>you, then, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God through transgression of the law? <sup>24</sup>For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles on account of you, just as it has been written.**

(a) Paul drives home to his imaginary Jewish opponent the foolishness of thinking that mere possession of the law will work for their salvation. If Jews do not practice the truth they preach from the law, they are hypocrites who dishonor God and cause him to be blasphemed among the Gentiles, as reported in texts like Isa. 52:5b.<sup>36</sup>

(b) He is not suggesting that every Jew steals, commits adultery, or robs pagan temples (perhaps in the sense of trafficking in precious metals from articles stolen from such temples),<sup>37</sup> or even suggesting that these sins were prevalent among Jews. Rather, as Moo observes, "these sins are representative of the contradiction between claim and conduct that

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<sup>36</sup> The blaspheming of the Lord's name in that verse is by foreign oppressors of Israel. It is attributable to Israel's disobedience because that is what brought them into exile. There may also be a reference to Ezek. 36:20-23.

<sup>37</sup> Moo (2018), 173.

does pervade Judaism."<sup>38</sup> It is a way of making the point that they do not live up to the demands of the law they proclaim. If those examples miss the mark in their specific case, they are merely illustrative. The list could continue until every Jew answered "Yes," as indicated by v. 23, which speaks simply of "transgression of the law." Paul may have chosen these dramatic violations of the law to arouse a sense of condemnation among the Jews that he turns back on them by suggesting that other contradictions between claim and conduct, other transgressions of the law they tout, are no less hypocritical and thus similar in kind if not degree to the conduct they consider appalling.

## (2) Circumcision (2:25-29)

**<sup>25</sup>For circumcision is of value if you practice the law, but if you are a transgressor of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup>If, therefore, the uncircumcised one observes the righteous decrees of the law, will not his uncircumcision be considered as circumcision? <sup>27</sup>And so the one uncircumcised by nature who keeps the law will judge you, the transgressor of the law who has the letter and circumcision. <sup>28</sup>It is not the Jew in outward appearance nor the one circumcised in outward appearance, in the flesh, <sup>29</sup>but the Jew in inward reality, the one circumcised of heart, by the Spirit not the letter, whose praise is not from people but from God.**

(a) As Moo notes, "Paul's central concern is again (as in vv. 7, 10, and 14-15) to set forth the impartial standard of judgment outside of Christ."<sup>39</sup> Jack Cottrell states:

Paul's purpose in [2:25-29] then, is to do with circumcision what he has already done with the law, namely, show that it is no basis for special treatment on Judgment Day. I.e., the Apostle "turns his fire so as to dislodge the Jew from his deceptive stronghold. He drives him from his hope and trust in circumcision" (MP, 315).

Paul accomplishes this in two steps. First (vv. 25-27), continuing in the diatribe style, he shows that circumcision does not take precedence over the law's more fundamental requirement, obedience itself. As he has done throughout the chapter thus far, here he continues to speak of the judgment according to the rules of law. When God renders his final judgment for those under law (not under grace), he will divide them into two groups. But, contrary to the Jews' expectation, those two groups will *not* be the circumcised and the uncircumcised (equivalent to the Jews and the Gentiles). Rather, God will say, "All those who have *obeyed* the law as you have known it – circumcised or not – come over here. All who have *disobeyed* the

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<sup>38</sup> Moo (2018), 175.

<sup>39</sup> Moo (2018), 177.

law – circumcised or not – go over there." Thus under law uncircumcised persons could conceivably be saved and circumcised persons lost.<sup>40</sup>

(b) Paul says circumcision is of value, meaning there are benefits to being a Jew, as he will elucidate in 3:1-2 and 9:4-5, but guaranteed exemption from the wrath of God at the judgment is not one of them. If, apart from grace, a circumcised one transgresses the Mosaic law, fails to conform to it perfectly,<sup>41</sup> then his circumcision has become uncircumcision in the sense that he will be condemned, which is the fate that Jews expected for uncircumcised Gentiles. Again, there is no longer any grace under the old covenant because its sacrifices for sin are not recognized in light of Christ having instituted the new covenant.

(c) Because God's judgment outside of Christ is an impartial judgment based on obedience, if a Gentile, an uncircumcised person, were to keep the law, then his uncircumcision would be considered as circumcision in the sense he would receive the exemption from judgment that the Jews expected their circumcision to provide. In that case, he would judge, meaning stand as a condemning witness against, the one who, though having the law and circumcision, transgressed the law and was thus condemned.

(d) Paul concludes the entire passage<sup>42</sup> by setting the principle that Jewish externalities are not determinative of one's status at the judgment in the context of the new covenant, giving a preview of the point he will later develop. Just as the outward appearances of Judaism, including possession of the law and circumcision, would not, under a law system, determine that Jews were saved and Gentiles were damned, the same goes for salvation under the new covenant. Regardless of ethnicity, the real Jew, the one whose praise at the judgment is from God, is the Christian, the one who has been circumcised of heart by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.

(e) A number of scholars, especially in the Reformed tradition, argue that baptism is the new covenant equivalent of circumcision and conclude that baptism likewise is irrelevant to salvation. I disagree with that. According to the NT, baptism is not merely a physical rite; rather, it is the moment of *spiritual* circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). It is when the "old man" is removed, and one is made new by the Spirit of God.

### ***c. God's faithfulness and Jewish judgment (3:1-8)***

#### **(1) The advantage of the word (3:1-4)**

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<sup>40</sup> Jack Cottrell, *Romans*, CPNIVC (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 1996), 1:215-216.

<sup>41</sup> Moo (2018), 178; see also, Cottrell (1996), 1:217 and Schreiner (1998), 138.

<sup>42</sup> Moo (2018), 183 (fn. 447) states, "Alternatively, vv. 28-29 might be the conclusion of the entire passage (in which case the *γάρ* is best left untranslated [as in NIV; CEB; NAB; NJB]); see Longenecker."

**What then is the advantage of the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?**  
**<sup>2</sup>Much, in every way. First, that they were entrusted with the sayings of God.**  
**<sup>3</sup>For what if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify the**  
**faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup>Absolutely not! Let God be truthful and every person a**  
**liar, just as it is written: "that you may be proved right in your words and will**  
**prevail when you contend."**

(a) Having argued that possession of the law and circumcision (that is, being Jewish) make no essential difference for the day of judgment, Paul poses an objection that a Jew would raise – "Well if being Jewish doesn't exempt one from judgment, then you are saying there is no advantage to being Jewish."

(b) Paul says, "Not so." The advantage of being a Jew extends to a significant number of matters<sup>43</sup> (see, 9:4-5), the first of which is that they have been entrusted with the sayings or oracles of God. That God's word, which includes his promises, came to the Jew is indicative of his special relationship with them. Deuteronomy 4:8 says, "And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" and Ps. 147:19-20 says, "He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel.  
<sup>20</sup> He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD!" Cottrell states:

The Jews' basic problem was the assumption that their election to God's service gave them a kind of automatic pass to heaven. Chapter 2 shows that this was false. But here Paul explains that even though this was not the case, there were many great and glorious privileges shared by every person born into Abraham's covenant family, whether he will ultimately be saved or not. . . .

The one advantage mentioned here is that the Jews "have been entrusted with the very words of God." It is important in this context to stress, even if reference to the others can be delayed until later. This is because of what Paul has just said about the Law of Moses in chapter 2, namely, that mere possession of this specially-revealed law was no basis for any Jew's personal salvation. Does this mean that the Jews' possession of God's special revelation was a trivial and inconsequential thing? No! On the contrary, it is a unique and glorious privilege, and one that is appropriately emphasized at this juncture.<sup>44</sup>

(c) In a highly condensed form, Paul in v. 3 anticipates that a Jew might say, "But what real advantage is there in being entrusted with the Scriptures if, as you claim, Israel will be subject to judgment just like the Gentiles, so that those who were disobedient, unfaithful to the words with which they were entrusted, will be condemned? Would that not mean that God was unfaithful to his promises to Israel expressed in those Scriptures (which they

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<sup>43</sup> Moo (2018), 191, notes, "'In every way' seems to claim an advantage for the Jew 'in every respect,' but Paul's meaning is more likely to be that the Jews' advantage extends to a significant number of matters."

<sup>44</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:225.

mistakenly assumed included exemption from judgment) and therefore mean that those Scriptures are not as sacred and glorious as you suggest?"

(d) The notion that Jewish unfaithfulness would nullify the faithfulness or trustworthiness of God and thus devalue his word is completely off base. Paul exclaims in response to the idea (v. 4), "Absolutely not!" or "By no means!" The fact Jewish unfaithfulness, disobedience, will be judged impartially is not *contrary* to God's word, making him unfaithful or unreliable, but *according* to his word. Moo states, "'The oracles of God' include warnings that God will judge sin as well as promises that he will bless his people. Because of this, the OT insists that God is equally faithful when he judges his people's sin and when he fulfills his promises [of blessings]"<sup>45</sup> (citing Neh. 9:32-33; Lam. 1:18). So unfaithfulness on their part in no way diminishes the word with which they were entrusted. God remains true to that word even if every human being should be a liar, and thus that word is indeed a unique treasure.

## (2) No problem with God's faithfulness being shown in judgment (3:5-8)

**<sup>5</sup>But if our unrighteousness demonstrates God's righteousness, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous for inflicting wrath? (I speak as a human.)**

**<sup>6</sup>Absolutely not! For in that case, how will God judge the world? <sup>7</sup>But if, by my lie, the truth of God abounded to his glory, why am I still judged as a sinner?**

**<sup>8</sup>Why not also say - as we are being blasphemed and as some claim we say - "Let us do evil so that good may come"? Their judgment is deserved.**

(a) Having said that God's "righteousness" (here meaning his faithfulness to himself and his word) is shown even in his judgment of unrighteousness, Paul raises the objection that this would somehow make it unjust or unrighteous for God to judge sin (because sin is ultimately good in that it provides a platform for the exhibition of God's faithfulness). Just the mention of the idea of God being unrighteous causes Paul to give "a parenthetical apology for having presented . . . a thought which is all too human in its weakness and folly," and it underlines his own repudiation of the thought."<sup>46</sup>

(b) Paul summarily rejects the idea as absurd. If it were unjust for God to inflict wrath on unrighteousness, then he could not judge the world in the end, because he is perfectly just. Since he is in fact going to judge the world, a proposition they all accepted, that proves it is not unjust for him to do so. Case closed.

(c) Paul reiterates the objection in v. 7, and then says in v. 8, if you are going to say that then why not say – as some slanderously say about us – that we should sin so good may come of it. God's judgment on such people (those making these claims) is deserved.

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<sup>45</sup> Moo (2018), 197.

<sup>46</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:231, quoting Cranfield, 1:184.

### 3. The guilt of all humanity (3:9-20)

**<sup>9</sup>What then? Do we have an advantage? Not in every respect. For we already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup>just as it is written, "There is not a righteous person, not even one; <sup>11</sup>there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup>All turned away; together they became worthless. There is no one who shows kindness; there is not as much as one. <sup>13</sup>Their throats are opened graves; they deceived with their tongues; the venom of asps is under their lips. <sup>14</sup>Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness; <sup>15</sup>their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>ruin and misery are in their paths, <sup>17</sup>and they did not know the way of peace. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear of God before their eyes."**

**<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those with the law, so that every mouth may be shut and all the world may be accountable to God, <sup>20</sup>because no flesh will be pronounced righteous in his sight from works of the law, for through the law [comes] the knowledge of sin.**

a. Cottrell offers this introductory summary of these verses:

Paul's main point in the first main section of Romans [1:18-3:20] is to show that no one can be saved by law or law-keeping. Only a perfect person can hope to be accepted by God under the law system. The sad fact is that no such person exists. Every person is a law-breaker and is thus without hope under law.

In the first two points of this section Paul has dealt with the two alleged exceptions to this rule: the Gentiles, or those without special revelation (1:18-32); and the Jews, or those who do have special revelation (2:1-3:8). Now in this final point (3:9-20) he pulls all this together and draws his intended conclusion. He reaffirms the reality of universal sinfulness (v. 9), provides OT confirmation of it (vv. 10-18), and stresses the impotence of law as the result of it (vv. 19-20).<sup>47</sup>

b. The fact God has related specially to the Jews in history does not mean they have an advantage over Gentiles in terms of judgment and salvation. Apart from Christ, everybody is judged on their works, not on whether they are a Jew or a Gentile. And as Paul has already shown in 1:18 - 2:29, all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin and are therefore guilty before God. The only hope is grace, and that grace is available only in Christ. (That grace was accessed in advance or "on credit" during the time of the old covenant through its shadow sacrifices, but that time passed with the institution of the new covenant.)

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<sup>47</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:233-234.

c. To substantiate his point, Paul cites a string of OT verses stating that human sinfulness is universal. He is not denying, of course, that some were acknowledged as being righteous in relation to others (e.g., Noah) or were righteous by grace through faith (e.g., Abraham). He is saying these verses are literally true in terms of humans as they appear before the Lord apart from his grace. Even Abraham and David were, in themselves, "unrighteous" in the sense of being guilty of sin.

d. Whatever the OT says ("law" in this wider sense), it says to those to whom the OT has been entrusted (Jews). The reason Scripture addresses the Jews is so that *every person* may be silenced, meaning having no defense before God. The idea is that if Jews, God's chosen people, have no defense before God, then it follows that Gentiles, who have no claim on God's favor as his special people, are also guilty.

e. The fact of the matter is that no one will be pronounced righteous in God's sight by doing what the law demands. That is true of Jews and the Mosaic law, but it is also true of Gentiles and the moral standard under which they live, the law of the heart, which overlaps with the Mosaic law. *If* one obeyed the law flawlessly, one indeed would be justified by doing the law (2:13), but no one does so because of the power of sin (3:9, 10-18). Moo states:

Paul makes clear that the problem with Jewish works is essentially the same as the problem with Gentile works (see vv. 2-3, 22-23, 25, 27). Again, this makes it unlikely that the problem with "works of the law" is narrowly Jewish. Rather, the inability of "works of the law" to justify appears to be bound up with a fundamental *human* problem: universal, enslaving sinfulness (a broad application that, as we have seen, is probably connoted by Paul's language of "all flesh"). In other words, the problem with "works of the law" is not fundamentally that they are "torah works" that maintained Israel's privileged position. The problem is that they are "works" that humans under sin's power (3:9) are unable to produce in adequate measure to secure righteous standing with God.<sup>48</sup>

f. Rather than justification, through the law comes the knowledge of sin. The law provides knowledge about sin's power, as we fail to obey God's commands and incur guilt and condemnation. Moo comments:

"Knowledge of sin" . . . does not simply mean that the law defines sin; rather, what is meant is that the law gives to people an understanding of "sin" (singular) as a power that holds everyone in bondage and brings guilt and condemnation. The law presents people with the demand of God. In our constant failure to attain the goal of that demand, we recognize ourselves to be sinners and justly condemned for our failures.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Moo (2018), 219-220.

<sup>49</sup> Moo (2018), 220-221.

## B. Justification by Faith (3:21 - 4:25)

### 1. Justification and the righteousness of God (3:21-26)

**<sup>21</sup>But now, apart from [the] law, the righteousness of God has been displayed, though being attested by the law and the prophets, <sup>22</sup>that is, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For there is not a distinction, <sup>23</sup>for all sinned and come short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being pronounced righteous as a gift by his grace through the redemption [accomplished] in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God set forth to be, by means of his blood, a wrath-averting sacrifice [appropriated] through faith. He did this as a demonstration of his righteousness, on account of the passing over of the previously committed sins <sup>26</sup>in the forbearance of God, as a demonstration of his righteousness in the present time, so that he might be righteous even in pronouncing righteous the one having faith in Jesus.**

a. Paul has now set the stage (1:18 - 3:20) to make his main point: the availability of God's righteousness to all who respond in faith. This "good news," announced in 1:17, is now elaborated. Martin Luther called this passage, "the chief point, and the very center of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible."

b. Law, in the sense of commands, is impotent to save because the power of sin is such that no one obeys perfectly. In reality, one can be saved only by grace, and that has always been the case. But whereas saving grace was available through the shadow sacrifices of the old covenant during the time of its applicability, God has *now* exhibited his righteousness, his saving action, apart from that old covenant ("law" in that sense). The page of salvation history has turned, and God has begun saving those who have faith in Jesus and no longer providing grace pursuant to the old covenant. Kruse states, "The primary sense of this statement [that the revelation of God's righteousness has been made known 'apart from the law'] is that God's righteousness has been manifested apart from, that is, without reference to the system of the Mosaic law."<sup>50</sup> Moo comments:

In the new era inaugurated by Christ's death God has acted to deliver and vindicate people "apart from" the law. It is not primarily the law as something for humans to do, but the law as a system, as a stage in God's unfolding plan, that is in view here. "Law" (*nomos*), then, refers to the Mosaic covenant, that (temporary) administration set up between God and his people to regulate their lives and reveal their sin until the establishment of the promise of Christ. . . . [The Mosaic covenant] has been

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<sup>50</sup> Kruse (2012), 179.

made "obsolete" (see Heb. 8:7-13). It is this basic shift in salvation history that Paul alludes to here, . . .<sup>51</sup>

c. This saving activity of God has now been displayed apart from the old covenant, but it is attested by the law and the prophets. Moo observes: "But Paul hastens to balance this discontinuity in salvation history with a reminder of its continuity. While God's justifying activity in the new age takes part outside the confines of the Old Covenant, the OT as a whole anticipates and predicts this new work of God: God's righteousness is 'witnessed to by the law and the prophets.'"<sup>52</sup>

d. This saving work of God is accomplished through faith in Jesus Christ and therefore extends to *all* who believe. Faith is the means through which God rescues condemned sinners, which he does by bestowing a righteous status on them, forgiving them of their sin.

e. This righteousness is available to and needed by all because there is no distinction between people (esp. Jew and Gentile) that has any relevance to salvation. As Moo states, "Jews may have the law and circumcision; Americans may lay claim to a great religious heritage; 'good' people may point to their works of charity; but all this makes no essential difference to one's standing before the righteous and holy God."<sup>53</sup> The fact of the matter is that all have sinned and therefore fall short of the glory of God, meaning fail to exhibit the godlikeness for which we were created.

f. So any who are pronounced righteous, who are declared acquitted of all charges, are pronounced so as a gift given by God's grace through the redemption (liberation through payment of a price) accomplished in Jesus (at the cross or when sinners become Christians). Our innocence before God is totally unmerited. It is something we simply are incapable of buying.

g. God put Jesus forth, by means of his blood (i.e., his death), to be a "wrath-averting sacrifice," the blessing of which is appropriated by faith. God's wrath is the inevitable and necessary reaction of absolute holiness to sin. The Father initiated this sacrifice of his Son, this outpouring of his wrath, so that he might forgive consistently with his holiness. He is not being persuaded to forgive, as though he is reluctant to do so; rather, he is providing the way to forgive consistently with his nature.

(1) There has been much scholarly discussion about the precise meaning of the word I render "wrath-averting sacrifice" (*hilastērion*). That word (the noun) occurs only two times in the NT, here and in Heb. 9:5, where it clearly refers to the "mercy seat," the rectangular gold lid on the ark of the covenant. But as Thielman notes, in this context, "Paul

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<sup>51</sup> Moo (2018), 242-243; see also, Osborne (2004), 93; David G. Peterson, *Commentary on Romans*, BTCF (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 187.

<sup>52</sup> Moo (2018), 243.

<sup>53</sup> Moo (2018), 246.

intended it to describe the means God used to answer the problem of his own wrath against human sin."<sup>54</sup> Michael Bird states:

Another disputed text concerning the atonement is the meaning of *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25. Paul writes that "God presented Christ as a [*hilastērion*], through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith" (Rom 3:25). Some translations take *hilastērion* as a reference to the "mercy seat" (NET; CEB), referring to the lid of the ark of the covenant, the place where the blood of a bull and a goat was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1-15; Heb 9:5), making Jesus the place of atonement. However, in the context of Romans 3:21-26, it is clear that the means of atonement is being described, given the reference to Jesus's blood (see 4 Macc 17.22; Josephus, *Ant.* 16.182). Accordingly some translations opt for a sacrificial meaning of "expiation" (RSV), others for propitiation (KJV, NASB, ESV), and the NIV and NRSV have a bet both ways with "sacrifice of atonement" (see NJB, "sacrifice for reconciliation"). The difference is that expiation means the removal of sin, while propitiation means the appeasement of wrath. Commentators are divided over which image Paul meant when he called Jesus's death a *hilastērion*.<sup>55</sup>

(2) I favor the propitiation or removal-of-wrath sense because, as Leon Morris explains, "Paul has mounted heavy artillery in the section 1:18-3:20 to show that all are sinners and subject to the wrath of God. But unless the present term means the removal of wrath, he has left them there, still under God's wrath."<sup>56</sup> As Bird points out, "we do not have to choose absolutely between *expiation* and *propitiation* since it might be more accurate to say that when sin is expiated (i.e., when our sins are cleansed), then God is propitiated (i.e., God's wrath is turned away)."<sup>57</sup> This is accomplished through Jesus' death, "by means of his blood."

h. God did this, put Jesus forth as a wrath-averting sacrifice, as a demonstration of his "righteousness," here meaning his righteous character or integrity. That demonstration was necessary because he had "passed over" sins committed before the coming of Christ ("in the time of his forbearance"). God "passed over" the sins of the faithful in the sense he forgave them without the demands of his holy justice having (yet) been adequately satisfied. You see, for God to forgive sin without satisfying the demands of his holy justice would make him less than perfectly holy and just. So there was an appearance of a "justice debt" in God's having forgiven sins under the old covenant. With Christ's crucifixion, with this public meting out of God's wrath against sin, that appearance vanished.

i. God's having presented Jesus as a wrath-averting sacrifice not only demonstrates his righteous character (holiness) with regard to his having passed over former sins,

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<sup>54</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 208.

<sup>55</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 460.

<sup>56</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 180-181.

<sup>57</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Romans*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 119.

but it also demonstrates it with regard to his acquitting sinners in the present because Christ provides full satisfaction of the demands of God's holy justice. Moo states, "Paul's point is that God can maintain his righteous character ('his righteousness' in vv. 25 and 26) even while he acts to justify sinful people ('God's righteousness' in vv. 21 and 22) because Christ, in his propitiatory sacrifice, provides full satisfaction of the demands of God's impartial, invariable justice."<sup>58</sup>

## 2. By faith apart from works of law (3:27 - 4:25)

### a. Initial statement (3:27-31)

**<sup>27</sup>Where then is boasting? It has been excluded. Through what law? That of works? No, but through the law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that a man is pronounced righteous by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God [the God] of the Jews only? Is he not also [the God] of Gentiles? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since there is one God, who will pronounce righteous the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through the faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we, then, nullify the law through the faith? Absolutely not! Rather, we uphold the law.**

(1) Paul indicates to his imagined Jewish dialogue partner that boasting has been excluded not by the "law of works" but by the "law of faith." He bases that assertion ("For") on the fact a man is pronounced righteous *by faith apart from works of the law*. So, the "law of faith" refers to the principle that salvation (being pronounced righteous) comes by faith. The "law of works" refers to the contrary principle that salvation comes by doing works of the law. Because a person is pronounced righteous by faith in Christ and not by any works of the law, no one will be pronounced righteous by living according to the Mosaic law, by doing works required by that specific law. Therefore, being a Jew, living according to the Mosaic law, offers no basis for boasting with regard to salvation.

(2) When he asks, "Or is God [the God] of the Jews only?" he is suggesting that this is the implication of claiming that God saves people through works of the Mosaic law. If that were the case, if that is how God saved, then only Jews could be saved because the Mosaic law was given only to them, which would suggest that God was only God of the Jews. The fact, however, is that there is only one God, and therefore he necessarily is the God of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. There are no other gods to claim sovereignty over a subset of people. And as the God of both Jews and Gentiles, he saves them in a way that accepts (and transcends) the ethnic and cultural identities of each. He does not require the one to become the other in order to be saved, but he saves them by "the faith," meaning faith in Jesus Christ, which one can have as a Jew or a Gentile. In other words, in the gospel the universality of God's rule is clearly manifested because in it salvation is available to Gentiles *as Gentiles*. The dividing wall of the law

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<sup>58</sup> Moo (2018), 262-263.

has been removed (Eph. 2:11 - 3:6). In that sense, salvation by faith apart from the Mosaic law flows from the fact of monotheism.

(3) Paul apparently was concerned that in response to his insistence that justification is by faith, to the exclusion of works of the law, some might accuse him of nullifying the law in the sense of rejecting its moral norms, embracing lawlessness. Paul flatly denies the charge. Rather than nullify the law, Christians "uphold the law," meaning they uphold the transcendent moral requirements expressed in the now obsolete Mosaic code. Schreiner states, "The idea is . . . that those who have faith in Christ will keep the law. . . . Righteousness apart from the law's commands does not mean that believers can dispense with the moral norms of the law."<sup>59</sup> Let me develop that a bit.<sup>60</sup>

(a) Mankind was under moral *requirements*, moral *duties* or *obligations*, from creation. A few of those obligations were given as laws, as expressly stated commandments. There were commands to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:22, 28), to work the Garden (Gen. 2:15), and not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). But there were many other moral obligations that were not declared expressly but which were known intuitively or innately as part of humanity being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). These "non-law" requirements, these obligations that were not spelled out in express decrees, are what Paul refers to in Rom. 2:14-15 as the "law of the heart."

(b) After the Flood, God entered into a covenant with Abraham in which he promised to bless Abraham and his descendants and to bless the world through his "seed" (singular; Gen. 22:18). This Abrahamic covenant was the primary or fundamental covenant governing the relationship of God with his people. The blessings God promised to Abraham and his descendants were predicated on their having a *living* faith, which includes their loyalty and submission to him (Gen. 12:1-4, 17:9-14, 18:17-19, 22:11-18, 26:4-5; Heb. 11:8-10, 17-19; Jas. 2:20-23).

(c) The Mosaic covenant was entered into hundreds of years later by God and the people of Israel at Sinai (Ex. 20:1 - 24:8). It was an interim or temporary covenant given until God's prior promise to Abraham to bless all nations through his "seed" began to be fulfilled with the coming of Christ, as Paul explains in Gal. 3:16-19. That covenant specified the way in which the faith of God's people was to be expressed, the shape that faith was to take, until Christ came. Its temporary nature is evident in 2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15-4:7, 4:21-31; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13.

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<sup>59</sup> Schreiner (1998), 208. Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner state in "Romans" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2008), 11:76: "[T]here is a sense in which the one who is justified by faith will also freely live out the righteousness of the law. Paul's argument to this point might seem to undermine this righteousness, and to forestall the expected objection, he affirms with great strength that far from overthrowing the law, the gospel of grace and faith establishes it. Those who are justified by faith will live righteously."

<sup>60</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Ashby Camp, "[Covenants and Commands - What I Wish Someone Had Told Me.](#)"

(d) The Mosaic covenant included the grandest and most complete expression to that time of God's moral requirements, but as I say, moral requirements did not begin when God gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai, a fact to which Noah's flood bears solemn witness. In addition to incorporating and articulating universal moral requirements that existed from creation, moral obligations that were known intuitively or innately as part of being created in the image of God, the Mosaic covenant included requirements that were peculiar to Israel, requirements that had no counterpart in the law of the heart to which all humanity was subject.

(e) Those requirements that were peculiar to Israel – things like dietary laws, circumcision, ritual purity laws, marriage restrictions, Sabbath observance, religious feasts and holy days, the priesthood and prescribed sacrifices – erected civil and ceremonial or ritualistic ("amoral") distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, probably, at least in part, to keep the people of God untainted by pagan practices in order to help them serve as a witness to their Gentile neighbors of the blessed life that exists under God (Deut. 4:6-8; Ezek. 5:5; Isa. 42:6, 49:6). Paul refers to this separating effect of the law in Eph. 2:14-16. These elements of the law were a dividing wall, a religious-sociological barrier, that ended up generating hostility from Gentiles.

(f) A new covenant was instituted between God and Israel (Jer. 31:31) through the sacrifice of Christ, the effect of which was to render the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, obsolete or no longer operative (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15-4:7, 4:21-31; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13, 10:1). And with the fulfillment in Christ of the planned obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant, *the set of commands* that was part of that covenant, the Mosaic law, ceased to be binding. This is clear from texts like Rom. 10:1-4, Gal. 3:23-25, and Heb. 7:11-14. It also is clear from the fact specific regulations that were part of the Mosaic law – such as Sabbath regulations (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6), food laws (Rom. 14:1-15:13; 1 Cor. 10:23-11:1), and circumcision (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 11-12, 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2) – are said to be no longer binding. That is why Paul, a Jew, could declare that he was not under the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:20).

(g) Though the *set of commands* (the group, body, or package of commands) that constitutes the Mosaic law ceased to be binding, many of the *individual commands included in that set* have an ongoing or renewed applicability in the new covenant and indeed find their full expression there. Thus, Paul in Eph. 6:2 commands children to "honor your father and mother," quoting from the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16. The Ten Commandments also are reflected in NT commands and prohibitions against idolatry, swearing of oaths, murder, adultery, stealing, slandering, lying, and coveting. And many other commands issued by Spirit-inspired writers in the NT are based on OT commands outside the Ten Commandments.

(h) A key point to note is that commands in the Mosaic law are not applicable *as Mosaic law*, that is, by virtue of being in the Mosaic law. Rather, they are applicable because they are preexisting, universal moral desires of God that were included in the Mosaic law. And because those desires were articulated for the people of Israel in the Mosaic law, one can cite that articulation of God's universal desire as a Christian requirement. That does not mean the Mosaic law or the old covenant are still in effect. It means only that the Mosaic law

included articulations of divine moral desires that preceded their embodiment in the Mosaic law and that continue after that set of laws was rendered inoperative.

(i) The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). Love is the center, the bullseye, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. It is not a subjective free-for-all. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of the Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that were included in that law and fully expressed through Christ (e.g., Rom. 3:31, 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). This ongoing moral law, centered in love, is the "law of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 9:21 and Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

### ***b. Elaboration with respect to Abraham (4:1-25)***

#### **(1) Faith and works (4:1-8)**

**What then shall we say Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has discovered? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was pronounced righteous from works, he has a reason to boast, but [it is] not [so] before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the scripture say? "And Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, the wages are not credited according to grace but according to debt. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who pronounces the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as also David declares the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are they whose acts of lawlessness were forgiven and whose sins were covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord in no way credits."**

(a) Having made the claim that salvation is by grace through faith for both Jew and Gentile and that boasting before God is therefore excluded, Paul addresses whether Abraham contradicts this claim. He no doubt chose Abraham because Abraham was revered by the Jews as their "father" and was held up particularly as a model of obedience to God. Moo notes that in Judaism, Abraham's "righteousness and mediation of the promise were linked to his obedience, it even being argued that he had obeyed the law perfectly before it had been given."<sup>61</sup> Also, Abraham played a decisive role in the formation of the people of Israel and in the transmission of the promise, so he must be integrated theologically into Paul's teaching if that teaching was to have any claim of continuity with the OT.

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<sup>61</sup> Moo (2018), 278.

(b) The fact of the matter is that Abraham does not have reason to boast before God because, as Scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* [or reckoned] to him as righteousness." This means that, by faith, Abraham had credited to him a righteousness that did not inherently belong to him. His response to God's promise resulted in God reckoning or imputing to him a "status" of righteousness.

(c) If righteousness/salvation is by works, then God is obligated to give it, just as an employer is obligated to give to his employee the wages he has earned. That, however, would contradict Paul's nonnegotiable theological axiom that God acts toward his creatures graciously – without compulsion or necessity. God is indebted to no one. On the other hand, this axiom is honored in the one whose righteousness is a gift given by God on the basis of faith. So obviously the righteousness of Abraham was not earned (not even by his faith – his believing was not a meritorious work).

(d) If *Abraham's* works did not earn his righteousness, then no works will. As John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople from A.D. 398-407, remarked: "For a person who had no works, to be justified by faith was nothing unlikely. But for a person richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from these, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder, and to set the power of faith in a strong light."<sup>62</sup>

(e) This teaching raises the question of how it fits with some statements made by James.

[1] Faith that saves is a living faith, a faith that finds expression in obedience. A dead faith is mere intellectual assent, a "faith" that says "Lord, Lord" but refuses to act as though that confession is true (see, Lk. 6:46). To speak of a faith that has no works is like speaking of a human life that has no pulse, respiration, or brain waves. Given that obedience inevitably accompanies saving faith, one cannot *remain justified* before God without obedience. The refusal to obey is conclusive proof there is no saving faith; there is only lip service.<sup>63</sup>

[2] The Jewish believers to whom James wrote accepted that Abraham's obedience in offering Isaac was indispensable to his continuing justification before God. If he had refused to obey, if his faith had ceased to be a matter of both mind and will, he would no longer have been right with God. When James states in Jas. 2:21 that Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar, he means justified in the sense that he maintained the righteous status previously bestowed on him. He maintained that righteous status "by works" only in the secondary or derivative sense that works are the inevitable accompaniment of saving faith. James stressed the works component of faith because he was addressing the error that one can be saved through a nonworking faith, through mere intellectual assent.

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Moo (2018), 288.

<sup>63</sup> For more on this, see Ashby Camp, "[Saved by Grace but Not Without Works.](#)"

[3] The statement in Jas. 2:24 that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone is similar. He means that a person is not saved by "intellectual assent" alone, by a so-called faith that that is in fact mere lip service. Saving faith is the "yes" of the total person, intellect *and* will. The faith of which Paul spoke was not a dead faith, a sterile, inactive faith. For example, he said in Gal. 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; rather, [what matters is] faith *working* through love." He said in 1 Cor. 7:19: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but the *keeping* of the commandments of God [is everything]."

(f) Paul refers to God in 4:5 as "the one who justifies the ungodly." This is bold indeed, in light of OT passages condemning human judges who "justify" the guilty (Isa. 5:23; Prov. 17:15) and in light of Ex. 23:7 where God declares that he will not "justify the wicked." The difference is that "justify" in Rom. 4:5 refers not merely to a judicial decision in which the guilty go free, something that mocks justice and condones evil, but to a *redemption* of the guilty, to their liberation through the great price of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

(g) David also confirms the truth of righteousness apart from works when in Ps. 32:1-2a he declares blessed those whose sins were forgiven, whose sin was not reckoned against them. Righteousness is credited not by counting one's works but by *not* counting one's sin. It is not something you have done but the *forgiveness* of something you have done.

## (2) Faith and circumcision (4:9-12)

**<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing, then, upon the circumcised [only] or also upon the uncircumcised? For we say: "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." <sup>10</sup> How then was it credited? While being in circumcision or in uncircumcision? It was not in circumcision but in uncircumcision. <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith which existed in uncircumcision, so that he might be the father of all who believe while in uncircumcision (so that righteousness may also be credited to them) <sup>12</sup> and the father of the circumcision, to the ones not of circumcision only but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had in uncircumcision.**

(a) Abraham also shows that the blessing of imputed righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, is for the uncircumcised as well as the circumcised. After all, Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness before he was circumcised. Circumcision was simply an after-the-fact confirmation of what was already present by faith. It did nothing to effect the transaction.

(b) He received circumcision as a sign of his preexisting righteousness by faith so that he might serve as the father of all who believe, both Jew and Gentile. Because he believed while uncircumcised, he is the father of Gentile believers. Because he believed

and was *also* circumcised, he is qualified to be the father of all Jewish believers, that is, those who follow in Abraham's faith by believing God's promise in Christ. It is through faith, and not through incorporation into the nation of Israel, that one becomes Abraham's spiritual "child."

### (3) Faith, promise, and the law (4:13-22)

**<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he would be heir of the world, was not through law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those of the law are heirs, faith has been emptied and the promise has been nullified. <sup>15</sup> For the law produces wrath. (And where there is not law, neither is there transgression.) <sup>16</sup> For this reason, namely that it may be according to grace, it is by faith, so that the promise may be certain to all the seed, not only to the one of the law but also to the one of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all <sup>17</sup> (just as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls the things not existing as existing. <sup>18</sup> He believed against hope on the basis of hope, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been said, "So shall your seed be." <sup>19</sup> And without weakening in faith, he considered his own body, which had already "died" (being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver in unbelief with regard to the promise of God but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God <sup>21</sup> and being fully persuaded that he is able to do what he has promised. <sup>22</sup> Therefore, "it was credited to him as righteousness."**

(a) The reason Paul, contrary to the standard Jewish view, made no mention of the law in tracing the spiritual descendants of Abraham is that the promise to Abraham (and/or his seed), which Paul summarizes as being (with his lineage) heir of the world, was realized not through the Mosaic law but through the righteousness of faith.

[1] The land promise given to Abraham came to be seen in Judaism as symbolizing a broader promise of ultimately inheriting the world.<sup>64</sup> Paul endorses that view but sees the fulfillment of the promise in light of Christ and all that is promised in him. The saints will receive the world as their inheritance in the sense their destiny is life in a redeemed creation, a matter Paul will address in chapter 8.

[2] Kruse quotes the following from Severian of Gabala, a bishop in Syria at the end of the fourth century: "Paul says that the righteous will inherit the world because the ungodly will be thrown out and handed over to punishment on the day of judgment, but the righteous will possess the universe which remains, and will have been renewed, and the good things of heaven and earth will be theirs."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kruse (2012), 212-213.

<sup>65</sup> Kruse (2012), 213 (fn. 122).

(b) For if the inheritance was to be realized through the Mosaic law, then one would believe in vain, and the promise would never be fulfilled because no sinful human being adequately obeys the law. As Paul said in Gal. 2:15-16: "We ourselves are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, <sup>16</sup> [but] knowing that a man is not pronounced righteous by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have believed in Christ Jesus so that we may be pronounced righteous by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, for no flesh will be pronounced righteous by works of the law." Rather than securing the inheritance, the law produces even more wrath. It turns "sin" into the more serious offense of "transgression," and though Paul does not mention it here, it actually stimulated and provoked disobedience in the unregenerate heart to make the need for grace (and thus ultimately for Christ) even more obvious (7:5, 8).

(c) The inheritance is realized through the righteousness of faith rather than through the law so that it may be a given as matter of grace rather than as an obligation. Paul said in Gal. 3:18, "For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise. But God has graciously given it to Abraham through a promise." It being given as a matter of grace not only glorifies God, who is obligated to no man, but also ensures that the promise will come to fruition and that it will do so for *every* descendant of Abraham, for both Jews and Gentiles of faith (the one of the law = Jewish believers; the one of [only] the faith of Abraham = Gentile believers). Abraham is the father of the faithful in all nations, just as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations."

(d) The God in whom Abraham believed is described as he "who gives life to the dead and calls things not existing as existing." God's giving of life to the dead is pertinent to Abraham's case in that his body "had already died" and Sarah's womb was dead (v. 19). God's calling things not existing as existing is pertinent to Abraham's case in that God declared him the father of many nations before it was so (in time).

(e) Abraham believed "against hope on the basis of hope." He believed contrary to human hope or expectation (e.g., "they were rescued against all hope") and with hope or expectation in God. From a human perspective, Abraham had every reason to give up the attempt to produce a child through Sarah. But despite the way things looked, he believed in God and thus fully expected that his promise would be fulfilled. This faith resulted in the fulfillment of the promise – he has indeed become the father of many nations, the father of the faithful throughout the world.

(f) Abraham did not waver in unbelief with regard to the promise. Rather, his faith gained strength from its victory over the hindrance created by the conflict between God's promise and the physical evidence. In this strengthening of his faith, Abraham gave glory to God. The more one believes despite the apparent impossibility, the more God is exalted as the one who is trusted to do the seemingly impossible.

[1] Paul is referring to Genesis 17:15ff. where Abraham is told by God that Sarah will bear him a son. I say that because he says Abraham was

"about a hundred years old," which is how old he was in Genesis 17, and he mentions that Abraham considered the condition of his and Sarah's bodies, which is just what he did in Gen. 17:17. So whatever you make of Abraham laughing at the promise and asking whether a son will be born to him and Sarah, Paul says it was not a case of: (wavering/doubting/being divided) (because of/in) (unbelief/disbelief).

[2] Because Paul is referring to Gen. 17:15ff., where God gives the more specific promise that *Sarah* would bear Abraham a child despite the fact they both were infertile, the question of whether Abraham's fathering of Ishmael in Genesis 16 reflects a lack of trust in the promise God gave in Gen. 15:4-5 is outside the scope of his remarks. But Abraham's fathering of Ishmael need not imply that he was doubting God's promise to give him a physical descendant through whom would come a multitude of offspring. The promise in Gen. 15:4-5 did not specify that this descendant would come from Sarah, and Abraham may have come to believe mistakenly that fulfillment would come through one other than Sarah. Perhaps impatience on Abraham's part and pressure from Sarah's distress over being childless (Gen. 16:2) contributed to his viewing the promise that way.

[3] Most commentators understand Gen. 17:17 to be an example of doubt on Abraham's part regarding the promise. If so, then Paul in Rom. 4:19-20 means that, despite the doubt he experienced, Abraham never lapsed into unbelief or abandoned his trust in the promise.

[4] But I am not convinced Abraham is doubting God's promise in Gen. 17:17. It could be he is laughing at the picture of him and Sarah as parents. In other words, he may not be laughing because he doubts God can do such a thing but laughing at the thought of God actually doing it. In that light, the questions are essentially questions of awe, "Will God overcome even the impossibility of our age to provide this blessing? Wow!" Either way, with or without an initial passing doubt, Abraham faces squarely the seeming impossibility of the promise and believes that God will do it anyway. (Sarah's laughter, on the other hand, is rebuked because it was laughter of doubt [Gen. 18:10-15].)

[5] Abraham's request regarding Ishmael in Gen. 17:18 need not be a reflection of doubt. God's promise is both amazing and humbling, so humbling in fact that Abraham says to God (17:18) that it would be enough if Ishmael could live under his blessing. In 17:19 God says, in essence, "No, your humble willingness to be satisfied with Ishmael being the child of promise will not alter my intention to bless you more greatly than that." He then says in Gen. 17:20-21 that he will also bless Ishmael, in keeping with Abraham's obvious love and concern for Ishmael, and repeats that Isaac will be the child of promise.

(g) Because he maintained his faith in God's promise, it was credited to him as righteousness.

#### **(4) Faith of Abraham and the Christian (4:23-25)**

**<sup>23</sup> But "it was credited to him" was not written for his sake alone <sup>24</sup> but also for our sakes, to whom it is going to be credited, those who believe on the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup> He was handed over because of our transgressions and was raised for the sake of our justification.**

(a) The statement in Scripture that it was "credited to [Abraham] as righteousness" was also written for Christians, for those who, years after Abraham, would trust in God's promise in the gospel (which fulfills God's promise to bless the world through Abraham!). As Abraham believed in the God who gives life to the dead and calls the things not existing as existing, so Christians believe that God raised Christ from the dead and will raise us also and believe that he has already called as existing the eternal blessing which he has in store for us. We are *now* righteous, but from the standpoint of Abraham, our "crediting" was in the future.

(b) The God in whom we believe is the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Jesus was handed over (by God – 3:25) to be crucified because of our sin and was raised for the sake of our justification.

[1] Paul puts it this way for rhetorical balance; he does not intend to separate our justification from Christ's death. Our justification was effected by both his death and his resurrection.

[2] His death was the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His resurrection may be linked to our justification in that it confirms that the atoning sacrifice has been accepted and thus provides a sure basis for the faith through which justification is received. It may be, however, that Christ's resurrection allowed him to complete the "sacrificial rite" by entering into the presence of God on our behalf. According to the OT, the High Priest not only offered the sacrifice but also sprinkled the blood on the altar in the Most Holy Place (Leviticus 16). Jesus, our Great High Priest, not only offered himself as a sacrifice by shedding his blood on the cross; he also entered heaven itself "once for all by his own blood" and appeared for us in God's presence (Heb. 9:12, 24; see, Heb. 6:19-20; 10:19-22).

3. Osborne writes:

So Paul has now summed up his points. In 3:21 – 4:25 his doctrine of salvation by faith alone, apart from works, is complete. At the heart of his doctrine is the fact that Christ's death was a "sacrifice of atonement" (propitiation, 3:25) that paid the price for our sins ("redemption") and resulted in God's legal decision to pronounce us "right" before him (justification, 3:21-26). The key is faith rather than observing the law, and this means that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (3:27-31). To prove this, Paul turns to Abraham, the father of the nation and

the one who precedes Moses (4:1-25), showing that faith has precedence over the law as the means by which one participates in salvation.<sup>66</sup>

### *III. Assurance Provided By the Gospel: Hope of Salvation (5:1 - 8:39)*

#### A. The Hope of Glory

##### **1. From justification to salvation (5:1-11)**

**Therefore, having been pronounced righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have had an introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only [that], but also we boast in afflictions, knowing that the affliction produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and the endurance proven character, and the proven character hope. <sup>5</sup>And the hope will not put [us] to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. <sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at that time, Christ died on behalf of the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For someone will scarcely die on behalf of a righteous man, though perhaps someone might even dare to die on behalf of a good man. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died on our behalf. <sup>9</sup>Therefore, having now been pronounced righteous by his blood, even more shall we be saved through him from the wrath. <sup>10</sup>For if, while being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, even more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup>And not only [that], but also we boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

a. Moo writes, "In this paragraph, Paul invites us to join with him in celebrating the marvelous benefits conferred upon the justified believer: 'the Apostle speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy' (Luther); 'it is now the believer who is speaking – in fact we might almost say, singing' (Leenhardt)."<sup>67</sup>

b. "Having been justified (pronounced righteous) through faith" sums up the central teaching of chaps. 1-4. By believing in Jesus Christ, the divine agent in God's climactic act of deliverance, Paul, the Romans ("we"), and all Christians have been "justified" – declared innocent of all charges justly brought against those who "sin and fall short of God's glory" (3:23).

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<sup>66</sup> Osborne (2004), 123-124.

<sup>67</sup> Moo (2018), 324.

c. As a result of this acquittal, we have peace with God. We are "right" with God; all is well with us. Rather than being enemies, we have been reconciled (v. 10). This peace comes through, and only through, "our Lord Jesus Christ." He is the only one through whom we receive justification (3:25-26), and thus the only one through whom we receive peace.

d. Jesus not only brought us peace with God, but he also introduced us into the "realm of divine favor" in which we stand. We are the blessed sons and daughters of God.

e. Having been justified through faith, Christians not only have peace with God but we also "boast" in the hope of God's glory. This means we are joyfully confident (some translate "exult" or "rejoice") that we will enter into the consummated kingdom, that perfect eternal state where we will be all that God intends us to be (see "glory of God" in 3:23; 8:17-18).

(1) Kruse writes:

The 'glory of God' about which we rejoice/boast in hope is the restoration of the glory lost at the fall. The status humanity enjoyed, being created in the image and glory of God, was marred by sin. In the case of believers, this is in the process of being restored as we are 'being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). It will be restored fully when our hope of sharing in the glory of God reaches its consummation in the new age (8:18-21, 30; cf. 1 John 3:2-3).<sup>68</sup>

(2) Schreiner states:

The parallels in Romans 8 (8:17, 18, 21, 30) demonstrate that this glory is an eschatological reality, not a present possession. The already-not yet character of Paul's eschatology emerges in this paragraph. Believers are righteous in God's sight, enjoy the eschatological covenant of peace, and stand in the end-time gift of grace. Nonetheless, the full promises of salvation have not yet been realized. We still await future glorification, which will involve moral perfection and restoration to the glory Adam lost when he sinned. . . . Believers are certain now that the glory Adam lost will be restored to them. Indeed, the glory restored to believers will be even greater than the glory Adam once had, for believers will be conformed to the second Adam, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29).<sup>69</sup>

f. "Boasting" in human achievement is excluded by the gospel (3:27), but "boasting" because of the gracious provision of God in Christ is entirely appropriate. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 1:31 and 2 Cor 10:17 ("Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord"); Gal. 6:14; and Phil. 3:3.

g. Not only do Christians "boast" in the hope of God's glory, but we also "boast" ("rejoice") in the very hardships that might cause some to doubt that we really are at peace

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<sup>68</sup> Kruse (2012), 227-228.

<sup>69</sup> Schreiner (1998), 254-255.

with God, in his favor, and headed for glory. We do so because, as we faithfully endure hardships, we prove our character (our "spiritual stuff"), which serves to strengthen our hope. A faith that is steadfast in trials, that maintains hope in the face of hopelessness, comes through with even greater hope than before. So what on the surface appears contrary to hope, in the end proves to be a means for strengthening it (see, Rom. 4:18-19).

h. The Christian hope will not turn out to be misplaced and thus a source of shame. We will not turn out to have been duped. We know that God is not making fools of us because the Spirit has taught us how much God loves us. Thielman remarks, "The Holy Spirit gives believers an inward assurance that God loves them greatly (cf. Eph 2:4; 3:17, 19; 5:2; 2 Thess 3:5)."<sup>70</sup>

i. Verses 6-8 declare the magnitude and wonder of the love on which our hope is founded. Human love, at its best, will motivate a person to give his life for a truly "good" person. God, however, sent Christ to die not for "righteous" or "good" people but for rebellious and undeserving people. The point is that God's love is far greater in its magnitude and dependability than even the greatest human love. It is conviction of this love that the Spirit brings home to the Christian heart.

j. In vv. 9-10 Paul reiterates and expands on the central idea of the certainty of Christian hope. The point is that, if God has already done the more difficult thing – to reconcile and justify unworthy sinners – how much more can he be depended on to accomplish the "easier" thing – to save from wrath on Judgment Day those who have been brought into such relationship with him. Thielman comments, "Believers can rest assured that God will save them on the day of judgment because, in a highly unusual move, he took the initiative to overcome their hostility to him by means of the costly death of his Son, even while they were still hostile."<sup>71</sup>

k. We are saved from wrath "by his life" (v. 10) perhaps in the sense that his life is the glorious life of the resurrection. He is the "firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23), and by being "in him" we share the blessings of that resurrection life (which excludes wrath). Or perhaps we are saved from wrath "by his life" in that the risen Christ continually intercedes for us before the Father as Paul notes in 8:34 and as is mentioned elsewhere in the NT (Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1-2).

l. Not only will Christians be saved, but as he stressed in vv. 1-4, we presently rejoice in all that God has given us in Jesus Christ, the one through whom we have received reconciliation. Moo quotes Chrysostom: "And so the fact of his saving us, and saving us too when we were in such plight, and doing it by means of his only-begotten, and not merely by his only-begotten, but by his blood, weaves for us endless crowns to glory in."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Thielman (2018), 268.

<sup>71</sup> Thielman (2018), 271.

<sup>72</sup> Moo (2018), 342.

## 2. The reign of grace and life (5:12-21)

**<sup>12</sup>Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned. <sup>13</sup>For prior to the [Mosaic] law, sin was in the world, but sin is not charged [as transgression] when there is no [stated] law. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a type of the coming one. <sup>15</sup>But it is not [a matter of] as the transgression so also the gift, for if by the transgression of the one the many died, even more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abound to the many. <sup>16</sup>And the gift is not as [that which came] through the one who sinned, for the judgment after one [transgression] resulted in condemnation, but the gift after many transgressions resulted in justification. <sup>17</sup>For if by the transgression of the one man death reigned through the one man, even more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.**

**<sup>18</sup>Now, therefore, as through the transgression of one man condemnation came to all people, so also through the righteous deed of one man the justification that leads to life came to all people. <sup>19</sup>For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup>But the law entered in so that the transgression might increase, but where sin increased, grace superabounded, <sup>21</sup>so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

a. The basic point of this section is certainly easier than the details. Indeed, Witherington remarks, "Here we are dealing with some of the most difficult material in all of Romans in terms of grammar and interpretation."<sup>73</sup> The basic point is this: the fact God has justified and reconciled his enemies through the death of one man, Jesus Christ, and can therefore be counted on to save them, is not as strange as it may seem. It means that just as there existed a death-producing connection between Adam and his own, so there exists a life-producing connection between Christ and his own.

b. The function of the opening phrase, "Because of this," is much debated. Moo paraphrases the transition at 5:12 this way: "in order to accomplish this [namely, that God has promised to save all those who are justified and reconciled through Christ], there exists a life-giving union between Christ and his own that is similar to, but more powerful than, the death-producing union between Adam and all his own."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Witherington (2004), 145.

<sup>74</sup> Moo (2018), 346.

c. The thought is begun in 5:12 where Paul says, "*just as through* one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and in this way death spread to all people, . . ." One is waiting for "*so also*" to complete the thought, but Paul digresses for several verses. It is not until 5:18 that he completes the thought, where he restates the "*as through*" comment of 5:12 and completes it with, "*so also* through the righteous deed of one man the justification that leads to life came to all people."

d. Paul says that sin entered into the human world or realm through Adam and that death entered through sin. Death followed as the byproduct of sin. Adam, the first man, is held responsible for introducing this plague into the human experience; he is what epidemiologists call "ground zero." Paul is well aware that Eve sinned first (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14), but Adam is the representative of mankind in salvation history.

e. Death came to Adam as God's righteous judgment on sin. God imposed the death penalty, which involved spiritual, physical, and eternal death.

(1) As Kruse points out, the claim by some that Paul here refers *only* to spiritual death runs aground on the fact Gen. 3:22 implies that Adam would have lived forever if he had not sinned.<sup>75</sup> It was because of his sin that he and all mankind were excluded from access to the tree of life, which tree represents God's life-sustaining provision, as it does in Rev. 2:7 and 22:2. The statement in Gen. 3:19 that man shall now "return to the ground" confirms that physical death is included in the promised consequence of sin.

(2) As for the claim that Paul here refers *only* to physical death, we know from other texts that sin alienates the sinner from the absolutely holy God (e.g., Isa. 59:2; Deut. 31:17-18; Ps. 34:16; Prov. 15:29; Jer. 5:24-25; Mic. 3:4; Hab. 1:13; Eph. 2:1-2; Col. 2:13). Schreiner states, "Some scholars have restricted death here to physical death (Sanday and Headlam 1902: 132-33; Murray 1959: 181-182; Ziesler 1989: 145). This is a mistake, for the context clarifies that death is both spiritual and physical (cf. Beker 1980: 224)."<sup>76</sup>

(3) Moo observes, "Paul frequently uses 'death' and related words to designate a 'physico-spiritual entity' – 'total death,' the penalty incurred for sin. Here, then, Paul may simply have in mind this death in both its physical and spiritual aspects."<sup>77</sup> Stott says the statement that death entered the world through sin "is an allusion to Genesis 2:17 and 3:19, where death (both physical and spiritual) is said to have been the penalty for disobedience (cf. 1:32; 6:23)."<sup>78</sup> Adam Harwood likewise remarks, "The most significant consequence of sin is death, both physical and spiritual death."<sup>79</sup> Indeed, this is the view of most commentators.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kruse (2012), 243.

<sup>76</sup> Schreiner (1998), 272.

<sup>77</sup> Moo (2018), 348.

<sup>78</sup> Stott (1994), 150.

<sup>79</sup> Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022), 349.

<sup>80</sup> Moo (2018), 348 (fn. 166).

f. Adam died *spiritually* on the day he sinned in that he was immediately alienated from God, the source of all life. But he also died *physically* that day, as promised in Gen. 2:17, in the sense that from that day God would not sustain physical human life eternally. God's provision of physical immortality was conditioned on Adam not sinning, so when he sinned, God withdrew that conditional grant, and mankind became unconditionally mortal. From that day, Adam was a dead man walking; all humanity was doomed to die physically.

(1) This usage is paralleled in 1 Ki. 2:36-37, where Solomon tells Shimei that *on the day* he crosses the Kidron Valley he will die. Shimei crossed the Kidron three years later to retrieve two of his servants who had run away to Gath, some 20 miles from Jerusalem, but he did not literally die until days later, after he returned from Gath and Solomon learned of his journey. The import of Solomon's statement was that on the day Shimei crossed the Kidron he would make his death certain.

(2) As Paul specifies 1 Cor. 15:26, physical death is an enemy, an intruder into God's creation. It came on the heels of sin; it was not part of the original very good creation of God. Robert Mounce states: "Death is the natural consequence of sin. The death of which Paul spoke was, on the one hand, physical. While Adam and Eve did not die physically for a number of years, the seeds of death were planted at the moment of disobedience."<sup>81</sup> John Walton explains:

Jeremiah 26:8 uses the same phrase as we have in Genesis 2:17 ["you will surely die"], but it is Jeremiah 26:11 that shows us exactly what the people mean by using that phrase in verse 8. When they say, "You will surely die," they are talking about the eventual outcome of the behavior. The sentence will be passed, the doom will be fixed. This phrase is also used in the historical literature to pass sentence on offenders of various kinds (Gen. 20:7; Num. 26:65; 1 Sam. 14:39, 44; 1 Kings 2:37, 42). The resulting paraphrase of Genesis 2:17 then is: "When you eat of it, you will be sentenced to death and therefore doomed to die." Consequently, death will be a certainty.<sup>82</sup>

g. In being alienated from God because of his sin, in experiencing spiritual death, Adam also was under eternal condemnation. Barring restoration of spiritual life through forgiveness during his now temporary physical life, he would be sent to hell at the final judgment, what in Revelation is called the "second death."

h. This is similar to what happens to us when we sin. God sentences us to "total death." We die spiritually in that we are alienated from God, and we are condemned to die physically and eternally. In other words, for the unforgiven sinner, even physical death is part of his punishment for sin.

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<sup>81</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 140-141.

<sup>82</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 174-175.

(1) That is not to say that those without sin (unaccountable) or those who have been forgiven will not die physically. Death is the lot of mankind. Babies sometimes die, and Christians will all die physically unless the Lord returns before then. The difference is that, for those without sin (unaccountable) and for those who have been forgiven, physical death is merely a *consequence* of Adam's sin, not a *punishment* for having participated in that sin.

(a) As I explained, Adam's sin changed the situation of mankind. When Adam was excluded from the tree of life, God's life-sustaining provision, *mankind* was excluded and thus became mortal. That is why Scripture says that to die is "to go the way of all the earth" (Josh. 23:14; 1 Kings 2:2) and that "It is appointed to men to die once" (Heb. 9:27). Paul also may be referring to this "simple mortality" in 1 Cor. 15:22 ("as in Adam all die"). See also, 2 Sam. 12:23; Job 30:23; Ps. 89:48; Eccles. 7:2 (esp. NIV, NET).

(b) The fact we are mortal as a *consequence* of Adam's sin is not the same thing as being sentenced to die as *punishment*, condemned to die as a judgment for sin. When we sin, our mortality ceases to be a nonpunitive consequence of Adam's sin and becomes a sentence. We are at that point *condemned* to die and no longer simply *fated* to die, and that is a big difference. If husband and wife murderers were sentenced to live on a remote island as punishment, the children born to them on that island would live there as a consequence of their parents' crime, but not as punishment for it. Their state is not a judicial sentence imposed on them even though they live in the same condition as those against whom that state is a sentence. It is one thing to die as a judgment of divine condemnation for having sinned; it is another thing to die without divine condemnation, to die simply because mankind has become mortal.

(c) Though Christians die, Paul declares, "There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Our death (and the death of the unaccountable) is *not* a death of condemnation, whereas the death of which Paul speaks *is* a death of condemnation, as confirmed in vv. 16 and 18. Our death does not end in eternal death (hell, the "second death" of Revelation) but in eternal life through the resurrection. That is what Paul means when he says, "the sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:56). Death as a mere consequence rather than as a punishment, a judgment for sin, is death without the yoke of sin, and death without the yoke of sin is painless. It is a temporary passage to glory that is not to be feared (Heb. 2:15) but anticipated (Phil. 1:23).

(2) But why do forgiven people still bear this consequence of Adam's sin? Why are they not simply (a) kept alive until the consummation or (b) made immortal here and now? The Bible does not say, but since death as a consequence, "stingless death," is actually a blessing (e.g., Phil. 1:23), it does not really seem to be an issue.

i. Paul says in 5:12 that in the same way it happened to Adam, "death spread to all people, *because all sinned*." The phrase ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον is rendered "because all sinned" or "because all have sinned" by the majority of standard English versions (e.g., NRSV, HCSB, NIV, NET, ESV, NKJV, CSB, NASB). Bird states (2016), 178, "Thus, with the vast majority of modern English versions, we prefer the translation 'because all sinned' for the reason

that the conjunction *eph' hō* is best taken causally since it has that meaning elsewhere in Paul's letters (2 Cor 5:4; Phil 3:12; 4:10)."<sup>83</sup>

(1) With what is probably a majority of modern scholars,<sup>84</sup> I understand the phrase "because all sinned" to refer to acts of sin that people have committed personally and not to Adam's sin being imputed to them because he is their ancestor. In other words, just as Adam sinned and was therefore sentenced to death as God's judgment, all people after him likewise sinned and were sentenced to death as God's judgment. Death spread because Adam's descendants followed him in sinning and earned the same judgment.

(2) Scholars are led to this understanding of "because all sinned" largely because every other occurrence of the verb "sin" in Paul's letters, including Romans (see esp. 2:12, 3:23), refers to voluntary sins that people commit themselves.

(a) For example, Cranfield states:

[T]here is nothing in the context or in this verse to suggest that ἥμαρτον is being used in an unusual sense and that in every other occurrence of this verb in the Pauline epistles the reference is quite clearly to actual sin. We conclude that πάντες ἥμαρτον has the same meaning here as it has in 3:23 [for all sinned and come short of the glory of God], and that interpretation (vi) [that the phrase refers to men's actual sinning] is to be accepted as most probable.<sup>85</sup>

(b) The Roman Catholic scholar Joseph Fitzmyer states: "The vb. *hēmarton* should not be understood as 'have sinned collectively' or as 'have sinned in Adam,' because they would be additions to Paul's text. The vb. refers to personal, actual sins of individual human beings, as Pauline usage elsewhere suggests (2:12; 3:23; 5:14, 16; 6:15; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:28, 36; 8:12; 15:34), as the context demands (vv 16, 20), and as Greek Fathers understood it (see Lyonnet, Bib 41 [1960]: 325-55)."<sup>86</sup>

(c) Schreiner states, "The verb [Paul uses] refers regularly to voluntary sin that people commit in their own persons (cf. 2:12; 3:23; see Wilckens 1978: 316-317; Kasemann 1980: 148-49; Jungel 1963: 51-52; Fitzmyer 1993c: 417). It is quite improbable on linguistic grounds that 'all sinned' means 'all sinned in Adam.'"<sup>87</sup>

(d) Stephen Westerholm states, "However we define the relation between Adam's sin and that of his offspring, πάντες ἥμαρτον most naturally means that all

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<sup>83</sup> Bird (2016), 178.

<sup>84</sup> Moo (2018), 351.

<sup>85</sup> Cranfield (1975), 1:279.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 417.

<sup>87</sup> Schreiner (1998), 275.

committed concrete sins; moreover, the words are part of a phrase (introduced by ἐφ' ᾧ, "inasmuch as") affirming that people's sins led to their death."<sup>88</sup>

(3) Now, I have just argued that infants and the mentally incompetent die physically as a mere consequence of Adam's sin and not as an act of divine condemnation for their having sinned, either corporately in Adam or personally. Is Paul here contradicting that and saying that infants do in fact die because they in some way sinned, either corporately in Adam or personally? I do not think so.

(a) I agree with those who conclude that Paul is using "all" in the phrase "because all sinned" in 5:12 in the same sense he used "all" in 3:9-20, 23. When he says "all sinned" in 3:9-20, 23, he clearly is speaking of actual disobedience, so infants are not under consideration; they cannot engage in the acts he describes. Paul means "all" of those of sufficient maturity or mental capacity to be accountable.

[1] As Fitzmyer remarks, to take "all" in Rom. 5:12 to include infants is "a precision that Paul does not envisage."<sup>89</sup> Craig Keener states regarding 3:23 that "Jewish sources agreed that everyone sinned (*with rare exceptions, like a young child*)"<sup>90</sup> (emphasis supplied).

[2] Cranfield states: "It has also sometimes been argued that πάντες [all] must include those who have died in infancy, and that the contention that infants participate by seminal identity in the primal sin of Adam is more intelligible than the contention that they commit actual sins. But those who die in infancy are a special and exceptional case, and Paul must surely be assumed to be thinking in terms of adults."<sup>91</sup>

[3] Moo states that "Paul may want [in 5:12] to describe only the situation of responsible adults."<sup>92</sup> He writes a bit later, "As we noted in commenting on v. 12, Paul does not seem even to be considering in these verses the special issues created for the doctrine of universal sin and judgment by mentally restricted human beings."<sup>93</sup>

(b) That Paul does not intend to include infants within the "all sinned" of Rom. 5:12 is confirmed in my mind by Paul's reference to knowledge as a key to culpability (1:19-20, 32, 2:1-3, 14-15). Infants are not aware of creation (they cannot even see) and do not yet appreciate the moral requirements God has planted in their hearts, so they lack what Paul indicates is necessary for committing acts of sin (which, as I have said, is what the verb "sin" regularly means).

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<sup>88</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 423.

<sup>89</sup> Fitzmyer (1993), 413.

<sup>90</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 420.

<sup>91</sup> Cranfield (1975), 1:279.

<sup>92</sup> Moo (2018), 354 (fn. 192).

<sup>93</sup> Moo (2018), 358 (fn. 209).

(c) Remember that children were not the center of attention in ancient culture, so Paul's focus on the accountable is not as strange as it may seem to us. He is writing a letter not writing a systematic theology, and thus he should not be expected to address every issue we might wonder about.

(4) Those who include infants within the "all sinned" of 5:12 do so by claiming that, though they did not actually sin themselves, they sinned "in Adam." In other words, they believe that all humans are born under a death *sentence* (not simply "fated" to die), born under divine condemnation, because they share in the *guilt* of Adam's sin; they are sinners by proxy. I think that is incorrect for reasons in addition to the fact it demands that the verb "sinned" carry the idiosyncratic meaning of "sinned by proxy."

(a) First, why would Paul spend so much energy in chapters 1-3 establishing that everyone was condemned because everyone committed sins if everyone was condemned simply by being human? Why not simply say all humans are guilty and condemned because they descend from sinful Adam and be done with it?

(b) Second, in Rom. 7:9-10 Paul says that at one time he was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and he died. I think it very likely that Paul is referring to a time in his childhood before he was accountable for obeying the law. As soon as the law became applicable to him, "sin living in him" (the predisposition to sin) sprang into action, producing transgression and consequent judgment death. If that is correct, Paul obviously was not born spiritually condemned. Rather, he was born alive and then died when sin caused him to transgress the law.

(c) Third, Ezekiel 18 makes it clear that the *guilt* of the fathers is not charged against their children. (This is different than the consequences of their sin being visited on their children.) For example, Ezek. 18:20 says, "The son will not bear the punishment of the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity." Paul echoes this theme of personal accountability in Rom. 14:12 where he says, "So [then], each of us will give account of himself [to God]." That eliminates for me the idea of Adam's *guilt* being passed on to us. See also, Deut. 24:16; 2 Chron. 25:4.

[1] Those texts that speak of God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Ex. 20:5, 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9) are best seen as a warning about the seriousness of sin. Sin is such a grave matter that God will (or may) punish the guilty father by extending the harmful effects of his sin to his descendants. Though the children may suffer, they are not being punished. Rather, they are serving as instruments of God's wrath against the rebellious father. Part of the father's punishment is seeing what he brought on his descendants (which I suspect is why it goes only to the third and fourth generation, i.e., to one's great grandchildren).

[2] By the time of Ezekiel, Israel had twisted this warning about the gravity of sin into a denial of personal accountability. God was punishing them

for their own sin, and yet they claimed they were merely receiving the consequences of their fathers' sins (by quoting the proverb "The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge"). They thereby avoided guilt, which removed the need for repentance. Since they were in fact being punished, and since punishment is inflicted only on the guilty, God demanded that they stop rationalizing their guilt.

(d) Finally, if children are born guilty because of Adam's sin, it poses quite a dilemma. Those that die in infancy must be either condemned to hell or saved apart from hearing and accepting the gospel.

[1] I say that because, as I have noted, the death that was imposed on Adam as God's judgment for his sin included spiritual and eternal death. And that is the death that Paul says spread to all men because all sinned. So if the death of infants is God's judgment on them for their having sinned in Adam, it includes spiritual and eternal death.

[2] Many, of course, allege that infants have their guilt of original sin removed by being baptized as infants.<sup>94</sup> I do not believe infants can be baptized according to Scripture. As Everett Ferguson observes:

The theology of baptism presented in the New Testament would seem to rule out infant baptism, in spite of its long history in Catholic and Protestant churches. Against the practice are the following facts: (1) There is no mention of the baptism of infants in the New Testament. (2) Every account of baptism in the New Testament shows it to be a response by believers (cf. Acts 18:8 as representative). (3) The evidence of church history places the beginning of infant baptism at the end of the second century.<sup>95</sup>

But even if infants were proper subjects of baptism, the problem still stands for the countless infants who die without being baptized. They are either damned or saved apart from hearing and accepting the gospel.

[3] Few proponents of original guilt are willing to accept the notion of infant damnation, so they argue instead that infants are (or may be) saved in some special way. The Bible, however, gives no hint of such a thing. On the contrary, it stresses that salvation comes through hearing and believing the gospel (e.g., Rom. 1:16, 10:8-17; 1 Cor. 1:18). If

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<sup>94</sup> Infant baptism, which is first attested in the late second century as something administered in an emergency to a gravely sick child, was normalized in the fifth century. Augustine, in his debate with Pelagius about original sin, used the general acceptance of infant baptism in their day as proof of original sin (in the sense of original guilt). If infants had no sin that required cleansing, there would be no purpose for them being baptized. After this Augustinian concept of original sin became entrenched, it was used as justification for infant baptism, flipping the argument of Augustine. See, Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 378-379, 627-628, 803-816.

<sup>95</sup> Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 195-196.

infants do in fact need salvation from sin, it seems strange that the manner of their deliverance is not addressed. If, however, infants are not guilty, the silence is more understandable.

(e) James D. G. Dunn states: "Guilt only enters into the reckoning with the individual's own transgression. Human beings are not held responsible for the state into which they are born. That is the starting point of their personal responsibility, a starting point for which they are not liable."<sup>96</sup>

(f) William Lane Craig similarly states:

If you believe with Roman Catholics and Reformed and Lutheran theologians that Adam's sin and guilt is imputed to every individual human being descended from Adam, then infants and the mentally disabled are going to also need salvation to be applied to them in some way because they carry the guilt of Adam's sin. On the other hand, if, like me, you're not persuaded that this doctrine is biblical, then infants and the mentally retarded are not born sinful and therefore have no sin that needs to be pardoned or forgiven.<sup>97</sup>

j. Though we all earn our own death sentence by committing our own sin, Paul's argument is more complicated than that. He says we all were in some sense *made sinners* by Adam's sin (5:19); death reigned *through him* (5:17). This indicates rather clearly that Adam's sin is in some way *a cause* of the sins that followed. In other words, all sin after Adam is in some way tied to Adam, is a *consequence* of Adam's sin.

(1) The best way to make sense of this, in my opinion, is to realize that Adam transmitted to all his posterity a bentness or proclivity to sin. We are a fallen race. Though our guilt and condemnation come not from the inclination to sin but from our acting on that inclination, the inclination to sin explains how our sin can be said to be a consequence of Adam's sin and why every human has chosen sin over God. Judgment death comes as a result of personal sinning *and* through one man. That, in my view, is preferable to forcing onto the phrase "because all sinned" an otherwise unattested sense of sinning by proxy.

(2) This understanding is held by a significant number of scholars. Kruse writes, "There is now a tendency among a number of scholars, no matter how precisely they construe *eph' hō*, to identify a primary and secondary cause for human beings becoming subject to death. The primary cause is Adam's disobedience, through which death first entered the world, and the secondary cause is the sin of disobedience of all human beings, who likewise bring death upon themselves"<sup>98</sup> (citing Cranfield, Byrne, Fitzmyer, Dunn, and Wright).

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<sup>96</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 97.

<sup>97</sup> William Lane Craig, "[Are Infants & the Mentally Disabled Guilty of Sin?](#)"

<sup>98</sup> Kruse (2012), 242.

(3) Harwood labels this the "inherited consequences" view, which he affirms, and describes it as: "[A]ll people inherit the consequences of Adam's sin, such as a corrupt nature, mortality, and a fallen world; however, people become guilty and fall under God's condemnation due to their own sin alone." He adds, "This was the Christian position before Augustine and has been affirmed by many throughout the history of the church."<sup>99</sup>

(3) As Moo expresses the view (which he ultimately rejects but grants that it "has much in its favor"), "Death, then, is due immediately to the sinning of each individual but ultimately to the sin of Adam; for it was Adam's sin that corrupted human nature and made individual sinning an inevitability."<sup>100</sup>

(4) Cranfield puts it this way:

According to [the most probable interpretation], ἥμαρτον [sinned] refers to men's actual sinning (death has come to all men in their turn because all men have sinned in their own persons voluntarily), but . . . their sinning is related to Adam's transgression not merely externally, as being an imitation of it, but also internally, as being its natural consequence, the fruit of the desperate moral debility and corruption which resulted from man's primal transgression and which all succeeding generations of mankind have inherited.<sup>101</sup>

(5) Donald Bloesch, a well-known theologian, states:

We become guilty of sin through our personal transgression, and must not assign our guilt either to Adam or to the devil. The Bible is clear that human beings are fully responsible for their sin, and this is why they stand under the condemnation of God. We cannot escape from responsibility by claiming that "I was born this way," or "the devil made me do it." Although even from conception we are under the influence of sin, we become personally accountable when we freely assent to this bias toward sin, which theology calls concupiscence. We are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph 2:3) because the virus of sin has corrupted our inner being, but our lack of resistance to this virus is what renders us culpable before God. Our essential nature is good, for we are created in God's image; our existential nature is evil, for we have allowed the proclivity to sin to gain mastery over us. Guilt is not inherited, but the weakness that leads to sin is part of our human inheritance.<sup>102</sup>

(6) Moo remarks:

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<sup>99</sup> Harwood (2022), 374.

<sup>100</sup> Moo (2018), 353.

<sup>101</sup> Cranfield (1975), 1:278.

<sup>102</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 47.

Why do people so consistently turn from good to evil of all kinds? Paul affirms in this passage that human solidarity in the sin of Adam is the explanation – and whether we explain this solidarity in terms of sinning in and with Adam or because of a corrupt nature inherited from him does not matter at this point. On any view, this, the biblical, explanation for universal human sinfulness, appears to explain the data of history and experience as well as, or better than, any rival theory.<sup>103</sup>

k. Whether this predisposition to sin has been transmitted socially, psychologically, and/or biologically is debated, but however it was transmitted, our sin, and hence our death sentence, is in some way connected to Adam.

(1) The social idea is that by tasting sin Adam gave it dominance in his life. It is an addiction that cannot be broken without divine power. All children are thus born into a corrupt, sin-twisted, and sin-addicted family and society and inevitably are bent thereby.

(2) The psychological idea is that, when man became mortal as a consequence of Adam's sin, he became inclined to overcome the resulting anxiety and insecurity by asserting his control and independence, which inclination leads to sin.<sup>104</sup>

(3) The biological idea, expressed in the Cranfield quote above, is that Adam's very nature was corrupted when he turned from God. This corrupt nature is part of what is inherited from one's parents.

l. Just how it is that we are blameworthy, culpable, for our sinning despite being heirs of the fallenness introduced by Adam is nowhere explained, which has led to divergent speculations about the matter.

(1) Paul seems content simply to hold these two truths in tension. As Dunn remarks about Paul's discussion in Romans 7: "The issue of personal responsibility [Paul] tried to resolve by depicting 'sin' as a power which fully masters the fleshly 'I' (7.14), without really denying the 'I' 's part in the evil it does or exculpating its failure to do the good (7.14-23)."<sup>105</sup>

(2) Maybe it is something like a drug addict who is surrounded by other addicts who normalize the use of drugs, enablers who facilitate the use of drugs, and dealers who promote the use of drugs. He will not *necessarily* use drugs, it being possible for him to choose otherwise in each specific instance, but in his state and circumstance he sometimes *will choose* to use drugs, and when he does, he will rightly be held responsible for that choice despite all the contributing factors.

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<sup>103</sup> Moo (2018), 356.

<sup>104</sup> See, Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 1:167-168, 174.

<sup>105</sup> Dunn (1997), 113.

(3) Norman Geisler has something like this in mind when he states, "The old nature makes sin *inevitable*, not unavoidable. Since we are free, sin is *not* necessary. . . . If sin were necessary, then we would not be responsible for it (see chapter 2), which the Bible declares we are (Rom. 3:19)." He says a few pages later, "[I]t is a mistake to view depravity as necessitating sin. . . . Sin in general is inevitable, but each sin in particular is avoidable – by the grace of God."<sup>106</sup>

m. Returning to Romans 5, to appreciate the point I think Paul is making in vv. 13-14 one must appreciate the distinction between sin and transgression. They are not synonymous.

(1) As I have said before, the Mosaic covenant included the grandest and most complete expression to that time of God's moral requirements, but moral requirements did not begin when God gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai.

(a) Mankind was under moral requirements from creation, as shown by the fact the people of Noah's day were destroyed because of their wickedness. But those moral requirements had not (at least for the most part) been given as "law" in the sense they had not been laid down as specific, express commandments. Rather, they were known intuitively or innately as part of the law written by God on the human heart (see Rom. 2:15). But violating those requirements was sin and was punishable as such.

(b) In other words, the existence of "law" in the sense of specific and express edicts or commandments to be obeyed is not necessary for sin to occur. It is the difference between "You knew better than to . . ." and "I specifically told you not to . . ." That is why Paul can say in Rom. 2:12, "For as many as *sinned without the law* will also perish without the law" and say in Rom. 5:13a that sin was in the world *before* (until) the law was given. Indeed, the Lord said in Gen. 4:7, long before the giving of the Mosaic law, "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

(2) "Transgression," however, is a different story. It is a species of sin. To *transgress* is to violate the will of God as revealed in an express commandment. So all transgression is sin, but not all sin is transgression.

(a) Cranfield states, "The idea contained in these words [transgression and transgressor], as they are used in the NT, is that of the transgression of a known, concrete divine commandment."<sup>107</sup>

(b) As Moo puts it, "'Transgression' denotes a specific kind of sin, the 'passing beyond' the limits set by a definite, positive law or command. While every 'transgression' is also a 'sin,' not every 'sin' is a 'transgression.'"<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 60, 64.

<sup>107</sup> Cranfield (1975), 1:170 (fn. 3).

(c) In commenting on Rom. 7:8, Schreiner writes, "Twice already in Romans (4:15; 5:13-14) Paul has distinguished between sin without the law and sin committed in violation of specifically revealed commandments. The latter is sometimes called 'transgression' (cf. 4:15, *παράβασις*, *parabasis*), and it can be distinguished from sin in general because it involves disobedience to a command revealed by God."<sup>109</sup>

(d) So the existence of "law," in the sense of express commands, is a precondition to transgression but not to sin. That is what Paul means when he says in Rom. 4:15b, "And where there is not law, neither is there *transgression*." As Moo notes, Paul in Rom. 4:15 "is not claiming that there is no sin where there is no law, but, in almost a truism, that there is no deliberate disobedience of positive commands where there is no positive command to disobey."<sup>110</sup>

(3) The statement in v. 13 that "sin is not *charged* when there is no law" does not mean it is not sin or that it is ignored and not punished. How could it mean that when in the OT, long before the Mosaic law, God killed all but eight people in the days of Noah because of wickedness and incinerated Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin? Rather, it means that without law sin cannot be counted as a violation of specific commands and prohibitions.

(a) As Ben Witherington remarks, "Paul cannot mean that God simply ignored sin since he surely knows the story of Noah. Thus what Paul seems to mean is that sin was not reckoned as transgression, for the latter involves a willful violation of a known law."<sup>111</sup>

(b) Cranfield writes:

["Not charged"] must be understood in a relative sense: only in comparison with what takes place when the law is present can it be said that, in the law's absence, sin [is not charged]. Those who lived without the law were certainly not 'innocent sinners' – they were to blame for what they were and what they did. But, in comparison with the state of affairs which has obtained since the advent of the law, sin may be said to have been, in the law's absence, 'not registered', since it was not the fully apparent, sharply defined thing, which it became in its presence.<sup>112</sup>

(c) Schreiner writes:

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<sup>108</sup> Moo (2018), 302.

<sup>109</sup> Schreiner (1998), 367.

<sup>110</sup> Moo (2018), 302.

<sup>111</sup> Witherington (2004), 147.

<sup>112</sup> Cranfield (1975), 1:282.

How then do we explain verse 13, which says that sin is not reckoned apart from law? The purpose of that verse is to explain that apart from the Mosaic law sin is not equivalent to transgression (Cranfield 1975: 282-83; Bornkamm 1952: 84). This is confirmed by both Rom. 4:15 and the present context, for Paul notes explicitly in 5:14 that Adam's sin was different in kind from those who lived before the Mosaic law in that he violated a commandment disclosed by God.<sup>113</sup>

(d) Jarvis Williams states, "[Paul] argues [in 5:13-14] that sin was in the world even before the giving of Torah and that it was not counted as transgression, whereas sin's universal reign over the entire creation was still evident even before the giving of Torah since death reigned from Adam until Moses."<sup>114</sup>

(e) Bird states, "So while sin might not have been reckoned during this period as a 'transgression,' a deliberate violation of a known law, sin existed all the same as evidenced by the presence of death."<sup>115</sup>

n. It is true that prior to the Mosaic law people did not *transgress* as did Adam, but they still *sinned*, and because they sinned, God's judgment of death spread to them in the same way it had come on Adam. In Johannes Schneider's words:

The command which Adam received and transgressed was that he should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Men who lived in the time between Adam and Moses sinned, but they were not guilty of transgression in the same way as Adam. For in the intervening period there was no express statement of God's commandment. Hence ἀμαρτία [sin] was present but not παράβασις [transgression].<sup>116</sup>

o. So the point of vv. 13-14, as I see them, is that the extent of Adam's death-producing effect on humanity was not limited by having skipped those generations that lived prior to the giving of the Mosaic law, as though sin and its accompanying death sentence could occur *only* when there was a "law," an express commandment like Adam had. Adam's deadly effect was realized in people's *sinning* not only in their *transgressing*, and thus he brought condemnation, judgment death, on all of mankind, including those prior to the Mosaic law. (Again, Paul is not considering the case of infants and those with mental defects.) The "death penalty" reigned over humanity from Adam to Moses because it was God's judgment (condemnation, vv. 16, 18) on the sin of those generations, which sin is traceable to Adam.

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<sup>113</sup> Schreiner (1998), 279.

<sup>114</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Christ Died for Our Sins* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 175.

<sup>115</sup> Bird (2016), 181.

<sup>116</sup> Johannes Schneider, "παράβασις" in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:740.

p. This assertion that death *as judgment* (condemnation) reigned between Adam and Moses follows from what Paul has already said about the universality of sin and God's penalty for it and from God's condemnation of sinners in the OT. Paul has made the point that all are "under sin" and that "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God," a fact acknowledged expressly in the OT (1 Ki. 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36). And God's judgment against sinners was revealed not only in the case of Adam but in such dramatic events as the Flood and the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah. The wages of sin is death, as Paul will say in Rom. 6:23, and that death, judgment death, characterized humanity even before the giving of the Mosaic law.

q. The fact there were people of faith between Adam and Moses who had the death sentence that was imposed on them because of their sin commuted by the grace of God, Abraham being a prime example, does not alter the fact that God's judgment of death spread to all people because all sinned as a result of Adam (by way of transmitted corruption). This is all Paul needs to make his point that just as there exists a death-producing connection between Adam and his own, so there exists a life-producing connection between Christ and his own. Judgment death "reigned" over humanity despite the fact some were freed from it through faith by the grace of God, which grace has now been shown to be rooted and centered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

r. Adam's wide effect on mankind is analogous to that of Christ, but there are some major differences, which Paul is careful to point out. Many people died by Adam's transgression, whereas many people received God's grace through the gift of Christ's act. Adam's one sin brought condemnation, whereas the gift of Christ's act brought acquittal after many transgressions. Through the disobedience of Adam the many were made sinners, whereas through the obedience of Jesus the many will be made righteous. (The statement in v. 18 that the "justification that leads to life came to *all* people" means all people in Christ, those who "receive the gift" [v. 17], i.e., those who believe [1:16-5:11].)

s. In 5:20 Paul says that the Mosaic law was given not to correct the situation created by Adam but to make it worse. The law intensified the power of sin by stimulating sinful desire (Rom. 7:5, 8) and by giving it the dimension of transgression. As Paul makes clear in chapter 7, it is sin not the law that is to blame for this. Sin used the holy and good law against its subjects (Rom. 7:8, 11-14).

t. This superabounding grace in the face of the increase of sin occasioned by the law (5:20) was so that, just as sin reigned in the sphere or domain of death, reigned in mankind as corrupted by Adam, so also grace might reign through the bestowal of righteousness on believers, which leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>117</sup>

## B. Freedom from Bondage to Sin (6:1-23)

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<sup>117</sup> See, Moo (2018), 375-376.

## 1. "Dead to sin" through union with Christ (6:1-14)

What then shall we say? Should we continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>Absolutely not! We who died to sin, how shall we still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore, we were buried together with him through baptism into [his] death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with the likeness of his death, then also we will be [united with the likeness] of his resurrection, <sup>6</sup>knowing that our old man was crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be nullified, that we might no longer serve sin as slaves. <sup>7</sup>For the one who died has been pronounced righteous from sin. <sup>8</sup>But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, <sup>9</sup>knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, no longer dies; death no longer exercises lordship over him. <sup>10</sup>For what he died, he died to sin once and for all; but what he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So also, you must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but living to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup>Do not, then, let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its passions, <sup>13</sup>nor present your members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those living from the dead and your members to God as weapons of righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin will not exercise lordship over you, for you are not under [the] law but under grace.

a. Having said that grace superabounded in the face of the increase of sin occasioned by the law (5:20), some might think Paul is implying that one should remain in sin, remain under its control, so that grace may increase. Recall 3:8 where Paul said, "Why not also say – as we are being blasphemed and as some claim we say – 'Let us do evil so that good may come!'" As in 3:8, Paul summarily rejects the idea as absurd. He declares, "Absolutely not!"

b. It is totally inconsistent for Christians – we who died to sin's detriment, to sin's loss, in that at the time of our conversion we were transferred from being in Adam, the realm of sin's dominion over us, to being in Christ – to continue to live under sin's control. To think otherwise is to ignore the fact that our sharing in Christ's death through baptism was so that we, like Christ, might rise from that death to "walk in newness of life," meaning to live life in a new state, one that is marked by the realities of the new age. Christ walks in newness of life after being raised from the dead in that he lives in a new state, one that is marked by the new-age reality of an immortal body; he is no longer subject to physical death (Rom. 6:9). We rise from sharing in his death through baptism to walk in newness of life in that we live in a new state, one that is marked by such new-age realities as empowerment by God's Spirit (e.g., Rom. 7:6; ch. 8). For if we have been united with the likeness of Christ's death (through baptism), then we also will be united with the likeness of his resurrection life. The one follows the other.

c. We know that our "old man" was crucified with Jesus in our sharing in the death he died once for all. That "old man" is the "man" of the old age, the man under the tyranny of sin and death. As Stott says, "what was crucified was not a part of us called our old nature, but the whole of us as we were in our pre-conversion state."<sup>118</sup> The "old man" is one who exists in Adam; the "new man" is one who exists in Christ.

(1) So this verse and Col. 3:9-10 make clear that the Christian has ceased to be "old man" and has become "new man." Yet, Eph. 4:22-24 commands Christians to "put off the old man" and "put on the new man." How are these to be understood?

(2) As long as we live in this overlap of ages, the new man in Christ continues to be subject to the influences of the powers of the old age, and he must continually resist them. In other words, we must *live* like the new creation we *are*. As Moo puts it, "What we *were* 'in Adam' is no more; but, until heaven, the temptation to *live* in Adam always remains."<sup>119</sup>

d. This participation of our "old man" in the crucifixion of Christ has the purpose of nullifying or neutralizing the body as the "body of sin," meaning the body under sin's dominion, a body that is used in the service of sin. This is explained in the clause (v. 6c), "that we might no longer serve sin as slaves." One reason our having died with Christ, our having participated in his death in our baptism, is to have this radical effect on our relationship to sin is given in v. 7: the one who has died with Christ in baptism has been pronounced righteous (or absolved or acquitted) from sin. We have been released from the dreadful condemnation that our sinning justly incurred, so the only appropriate response is that we run from sin as a terminally ill lung cancer patient who was miraculously healed should run from smoking.

e. Since it is true that we died with Christ (the sense of "But if" in v. 8) and thus have been pronounced righteous from sin, we *believe* (points to something promised) that we *will live* (future tense, as in v. 5) with Jesus, most likely meaning live with him as resurrected people, as sharers in his resurrection, when he returns. This belief is rooted in our knowledge that the resurrected Christ is immortal, no longer under the power of death (unlike others in Scripture who had returned to life), because his death was a death "to sin," a death that separated him from the power of sin that is manifested in the death penalty that sin brings. And that one-time, sin-power-separating (and thus death-defeating) death was for all who will share in it.

f. Though his death was a one-time death "to sin" for all, a death that was died to sin's defeat, the life Christ lives is "to God." His life is singularly focused on glorifying the Father through obedience to his will. So also, Christians are constantly to *regard themselves* as being dead to sin but living to God; we must continually lay hold of this reality. We must no longer see ourselves in our relationship to sin as we were outside of Christ. Rather, we must see ourselves as having died in Christ to sin's loss, as having been freed from sin's grip on us, and as living to God's glory.

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<sup>118</sup> Stott (1994), 176.

<sup>119</sup> Moo (2018), 399.

g. The practical side of seeing ourselves as dead to sin but living to God is that we must not *let* (allow) sin to rule us (our "mortal bodies") (v. 12) or *present* (offer) our bodily members to sin to be used as weapons of unrighteousness (v. 13).

(1) Now that we understand ourselves to be "dead to sin but living to God," we must constantly avoid using our bodies in the service of sin. We must not, for example, use our eyes to view pornography, our ears to listen to obscene music, our hands to steal, our tongues to lie, or our private parts to engage in sexual immorality. Rather, we are to offer ourselves in service to God, as those who through union with Christ have been rescued, given spiritual life from the state of death we were in, and we are to offer our bodily members to God to be used as weapons of righteousness.

(2) Moo states:

In characterizing the body as "mortal," Paul is reminding us that the same body that has been severed from its servitude to sin (6:6) is nevertheless a body that still participates in the weakness, suffering, and dissolution of this age. Until we are fully redeemed (8:23) and "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53), we will continue to be subject to the influences of this age; and the believer must not let these influences hold sway. The Christian is no longer "body of sin" (6:6) or "body of death" (7:24), but he or she is still "mortal body."<sup>120</sup>

h. The Christian can be bold and confident in his war against sin because sin's dominion has been broken – we are promised that sin will not exercise lordship over us. This does not mean we will not sin; that will only be true when Jesus returns. It means sin will not be our controlling power. We will stumble, but we will not *live* in sin.

i. Paul says in v. 14 that the reason sin will not exercise lordship over us is that we are not under the law but under grace. By "under [the] law" and "under grace" he is contrasting the old and new covenants. Not only did sin use the commands of the Mosaic law to arouse sinful passions (7:5), which work of sin God incorporated into his larger purpose of having the law serve as a trainer to lead the people to Christ (Gal. 3:23-25) because it highlighted the need for mercy, but the Holy Spirit's transforming power to live for God was not generally available. To be "under grace" is to be under the new covenant in which we have been separated from sin's power by dying to sin in Christ and being empowered by the Spirit to live for God.

(a) Moo remarks, "The paragraph that began with the question, 'Should we remain in sin in order that grace may increase?' ends with the good news that we are under grace in order that sin may be overcome."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Moo (2018), 406-407.

<sup>121</sup> Moo (2018), 413.

(b) Kruse states:

To be 'under law' means to live under the regime of the Mosaic law, under the old covenant where the law was something written on tables [sic] of stone, and to be 'under grace' is to live under the new covenant, where the law is written on the human heart (cf. 2 Cor 3:3). What was impossible under the regime of the Mosaic law (the fulfillment of the law's own demands) because of humanity's weakness is made possible under the new covenant because of the renewing and transforming power of the Spirit (cf. 8:3-4; Gal 3:23-25; 4:1-7; 5:18). While believers who live under the new covenant of grace no longer live under the Mosaic law as a regime, this does not mean that they are free to flout the moral imperatives found in the law, for these are the moral standards required of humankind by God himself. In fact, in those who walk by the Spirit the 'just requirement' of the law is fulfilled (8:4), for, as Paul says in 13:9, 'the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not murder", "You shall not steal", "You shall not covet", and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself"' (cf. Gal 5:14), and, of course, love is included in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).<sup>122</sup>

(c) Schreiner states: "Paul's point is that Israel did not keep the law as long as they were under the law (i.e., the Mosaic covenant). Now that believers are under the power of grace they are enabled to keep the moral norms of the law by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4). This is precisely what both Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (11:19-20; 36:26-27) foresaw occurring when the new covenant became a reality."<sup>123</sup>

(d) Moo cautions:

We are justified in considering the Christian to be free from the commandments of the Mosaic law insofar as they are part of that system, and perhaps in the sense that whatever commandments are applicable to us come with a new empowering through the indicative of God's grace in Christ. But we cannot conclude from this verse that the believer has no obligation to any of the individual commandments of that law – insofar, we may say, as they may be isolated from the system. Still less does this verse allow the conclusion that Christians are no longer subject to "law" or "commandment" at all – for *nomos* here means *Mosaic* law, not "law" as such.<sup>124</sup>

(e) But as I have already indicated, even though we as Christians are empowered to obey these ethical norms in a new way, we do "not yet" do so perfectly. Until the Lord's return, we live in the overlap of the old and new ages, in which we possess a down-payment

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<sup>122</sup> Kruse (2012), 269-270.

<sup>123</sup> Schreiner (1998), 327.

<sup>124</sup> Moo (2018), 414.

on the fullness of life yet to come. On that Day our sanctification will be completed, and we who are now being transformed into the image of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18) will be like him (1 Jn. 3:2).

## 2. Freed from sin to serve righteousness (6:15-23)

**<sup>15</sup>What then? Should we sin because we are not under [the] law but under grace? Absolutely not! <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that you are slaves to whom you present yourselves as slaves in obedience, to whom you obey, whether of sin, that leads to death, or of obedience, that leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that, though you were slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart the pattern of teaching to which you were delivered <sup>18</sup>and, having been freed from sin, were enslaved to righteousness. <sup>19</sup>(I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.) For just as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and to lawlessness leading to lawlessness, so also now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. <sup>20</sup>For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with respect to righteousness. <sup>21</sup>Therefore, what fruit did you have then? [Things] of which you are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup>But now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your fruit leading to sanctification, and the end is eternal life. <sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

a. Having addressed the charge that his gospel implies that Christians should sin because to do so increases God's forgiving, Paul now tackles the notion that his gospel leads to sinning through its claim that Christians are not subject to that body of commands known as the Mosaic law. Paul shows that this concern is rooted in a false dichotomy. The alternatives are not Judaism or immorality. One can be moral apart from Judaism, and for Christians that is the only choice.

b. Paul says that if you *act* like something's slave, it is the same as *being* its slave; you become a *de facto* slave. That is true whether you act like a slave of sin, which leads to death, or a slave of obedience, which leads to righteousness (and those are our only two choices). This is the same idea in Jn. 8:34 where the Lord said, "Every person who is committing sin is a slave to sin," i.e., is serving sin.

c. But thanks be to God that, though Christians *were* slaves of sin, they wholeheartedly obeyed the "pattern of teaching" into which they were (thereby) delivered. In other words, they obeyed that standardized body of instruction, that pattern of teaching, which is the gospel, and as a result they entered into that teaching and received its accompanying blessings. Specifically, they were freed from sin and enslaved to righteousness. Christian freedom is not autonomous self-direction but deliverance from those enslaving powers that would prevent us from becoming what God intends us to be.

d. Paul explains parenthetically (v. 19a) that his use of "slavery" in speaking about the Christian's relationship with God is merely an analogy or image, necessitated by the weakness of human understanding. It is not intended to convey the negative aspects of secular slavery (fear of abuse, confinement, etc.) but simply to make the point that God is a master who requires absolute and unquestioned obedience.

e. Just as, before we were Christians, we offered ourselves as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness, which led to increasing lawlessness, so now we must offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness, which leads to increasing sanctification, i.e., living that is increasingly God-centered and world-renouncing.

f. We can and must serve righteousness because, when we were slaves of sin, we ignored God's righteous demands, and as a result we did things of which we are now ashamed, things that end in death. But now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, our conduct leads to increasing holiness (being God-centered and world-renouncing) the end result of which is eternal life that is realized at the consummation.

g. For if you serve sin, the wage it pays is death. Grant Osborne remarks, "*death* here is both the physical death that ends earthly life and the eternal death that follows, though the latter is primary."<sup>125</sup> But if you serve God, he gives the gift of eternal life (and all that entails) in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## C. Freedom from Bondage to the Law (7:1-25)

### 1. Released from the Law, joined to Christ (7:1-6)

**Or do you not know, brothers – for I speak to those who know the law – that the law exercises lordship over a person for as long a time as he lives? <sup>2</sup>For the married woman has been bound to her living husband by the law, but if the husband should die, she has been released from the law of the husband. <sup>3</sup>Now, therefore, while the husband is living, she will be called an adulteress if she comes to belong to another man; but if the husband should die, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress after coming to belong to another man. <sup>4</sup>So, my brothers, you also were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, so that you might come to belong to another, to the one who was raised from the dead, so that we might bear fruit to God. <sup>5</sup>For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions [aroused] through the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup>But now, we have been released from the law,**

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<sup>125</sup> Osborne (2004), 166.

**dying [to that] in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.**

a. Paul said in 6:14 that Christians are not "under [the] law," meaning the Mosaic law, and then immediately (vv. 15-23) explained that this fact does not lead to sin. He now elaborates on the assertion that Christians are not "under [the] law."

b. I think Paul's targets are those Roman Christians who believed that the Mosaic law was applicable to Christians, including Gentile Christians. Though the Roman Christians as a whole would have been familiar with the Mosaic law, those urging its ongoing validity would have been especially identified with it. They would have been considered (and would have considered themselves) the most knowledgeable about the law.

c. Rather than denying the Mosaic law's applicability to Christians by declaring that the Mosaic covenant, and hence its law, was no longer operative as a result of Christ instituting the new covenant, Paul here argues that the law is inapplicable to Christians under its own terms. Perhaps he (by the Spirit) judged that raising the larger and potentially more controversial claim to a church he had never visited would distract unduly from the other things he wanted to communicate. He asks if those with knowledge of the law are ignorant of the fact that the Mosaic law, like law in general, applied only to the living. A rabbinic saying, which may have been known at this time, was: "if a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments."<sup>126</sup>

d. Paul illustrates this principle with a reference to the marriage relationship. The death of a wife's husband freed her from the law's obligation regarding her husband so that she was free to remarry (e.g., Deut. 24:3; levirate marriage). If, however, she married someone while her husband was still alive (assuming either no divorce or no divorce permitting remarriage), she would be called an adulteress, i.e., as one in violation of the law.

e. The point is that just as the wife was freed to be joined to another by her husband's death, so those championing the Mosaic law had been freed to be joined to Christ by sharing (through baptism) in the death of Christ. The purpose of this union with Christ was that they might bear fruit to God. Paul is not concerned that in the illustration the wife is freed from the law by her *husband's* death rather than her own. The point is that death removes legal obligations. In addition, the fact the wife remains alive, having been freed from the law by the death of another, allows her to be used for the additional point she is free to belong to another as believers are free by their death to the law through Christ to belong to another and bear fruit to God.

f. Paul focuses on Jewish Christians, those who died to the Mosaic law in converting to Christianity (see, Gal. 2:15, 19), because of his concern over the notion that the Mosaic law is binding on Gentile Christians. If Jewish converts were released from that law, then Gentile converts certainly could not be required to come under it.

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<sup>126</sup> Moo (2018), 437-438.

g. When the Jewish Christians were in the flesh, that is, without Christ and under the law (relating to God in terms of the bygone Mosaic order), the law was an instrument of their death in that their sinful passions were aroused through it. The law was actually used as an obstacle to their bearing fruit to God. But now, having died with Christ and been joined to him, they have been released from the law, with the result that they serve in newness of the Spirit rather than in oldness of the letter. They live life in the new order, not in the old.

## **2. Defense of his view of the law (7:7-25)**

### ***a. Does not mean the law is sinful or evil (7:7-12)***

**<sup>7</sup>What then shall we say? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! Yet, I would not have known sin except through the law. For instance, I would not know covetousness except the law says, "You shall not covet." <sup>8</sup>But sin, having obtained a base of operations, produced in me through the commandment all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin is dead. <sup>9</sup>And I was alive apart from the law at one time, but when the commandment came, sin came to life, <sup>10</sup>and I died; and the commandment intended for life, this commandment, was found in my case to be for death. <sup>11</sup>For sin, having obtained a base of operations, deceived me through the commandment and through it killed [me]. <sup>12</sup>So, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**

(1) In saying that the effect of the Mosaic law was to increase transgression (5:20) and to arouse sinful passions (7:5), Paul anticipated being accused of saying that the law was evil and sinful. That, of course, would destroy any continuity between the law and his gospel, between the old and new covenants, between Moses and Christ, and would thus be a theological kiss of death. Paul flatly rejects the claim that he is saying the law is sinful. The law is not itself sin, but the law and sin do have a definite relationship.

(2) The law brings knowledge of sin (3:20) in the sense it shows the real nature and power of sin. Not only does the law provide the opportunity for sin to express itself as transgression and spell out that the penalty for sin is wrath and death, but the law is also used by sin to stimulate sinful desires. Through the law, sin's power is actually enhanced with the result that one comes to understand the real "sinfulness" of sin.

(3) When Paul says (7:8b), after noting how sin exploits the command to its own evil purpose, "For apart from the law, sin is dead," he means it is "dead" only in terms of its ability to use the law to stimulate sin, to arouse sinful passions. That particular work of sin requires the law. He certainly does not mean that sin is harmless or absolutely inactive apart from the law because he has already explained how *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of

God (3:23), even those not under law (specific, revealed commandments), and how death reigned (through sin) even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression (5:13-14).

(4) At one time, Paul was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came sin came to life and he died. The matter is much debated, but I think Paul is referring to a time in his childhood before he was accountable for obeying the law, what Cottrell refers to as "the days of innocent childhood . . . before he comes to understand the significance of living in a world subject to the law of the Creator."<sup>127</sup> When he became sufficiently aware of the law and its relationship to him or was formally placed under its authority at the *bar-mitzvah*, the law became applicable to him – he became accountable for violating it – and sin living in him sprang into action producing transgression and consequent death. Jewett states:

Paul points explicitly to his own personal experience. That he was living "once apart from law" is most plausibly linked with the typical experience of a Jewish boy who was not required to obey the Torah until he was initiated as a "son of commandment." Critics of this view refer to early training in the law provided to Jewish boys and to their love of the law, but this does not address the question of the age when a boy was required to live under its authority.<sup>128</sup>

(a) Paul does not mention this, but commutation of that death sentence would have been available through faith under the law until the coming of Christ. And Paul, as a blameless (faithful) Jew (Phil. 3:6), would certainly have received it. With the salvation-historical shift effected by Christ's coming, forgiveness is no longer available through the old covenant.

(b) If Paul is in fact referring to himself here, he obviously was not born spiritually condemned. Rather, he was born alive and then died when sin caused him to transgress the law. Many exegetes refuse to consider that Paul is speaking autobiographically because their interpretation of 5:12-21 convinces them there was never a time he was spiritually alive. In their view, everyone is born guilty, born condemned, as a result of Adam's sin.

(5) Thus, the law is not sinful or evil. It is holy, righteous, and good. The culprit is sin which uses the law to produce death.

### ***b. Clarifying the law's role in death (7:13-25)***

**<sup>13</sup>Did, then, that which is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin [did], in order that it might appear to be sin, producing death in me through that which is good in order that through the commandment sin might become**

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<sup>127</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:436.

<sup>128</sup> Jewett (2007), 450-451. See also, Cottrell (1996), 1:436-437; Schreiner (1998), 364-365; Harrison and Hagner (2008), 11:120.

sinful beyond measure. <sup>14</sup>For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, having been sold under sin. <sup>15</sup>For I do not know what I carry out; for I do not practice what I will; rather, I do what I hate. <sup>16</sup>But if I do what I do not will, I agree with the law that [it is] good. <sup>17</sup>But now it is no longer I carrying it out, but sin dwelling in me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for to will [the good] is present in me, but to carry out the good is not. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good that I will; rather, I practice the evil that I do not will. <sup>20</sup>But if I do what I do not will, it is no longer I carrying it out but sin living in me.

<sup>21</sup>I find, then, the law, in me who is willing to do good, that evil is present in me. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in God's law in the inner person, <sup>23</sup>but I see another law in my members that is waging war against the law of my mind and making me a captive to the law of sin that is in my members. <sup>24</sup>A wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, therefore, I myself in my mind am a slave to the law of God but in the flesh [a slave] to the law of sin.

(1) Though sin killed him through the law (7:10-11), that does not mean the law is culpable in that death. The blame must be placed on sin, not on the good law that sin used to bring about death. Cottrell comments:

Even though sin uses the law for its own murderous ends, the law itself remains pure and holy and good. A person could take a hypodermic needle and inject poison into someone's body, but this does not make the needle bad. Someone could be beaten to death with a fire extinguisher, but that would not make the extinguisher bad. The evil lies in the wielder of these instruments, and all the more so for using something designed for good to produce such a baneful result.<sup>129</sup>

(2) Sin's evil work of using the good law to produce death was used to serve the good purpose of revealing the utter sinfulness of sin. Allowing sin to play this hand helped to expose sin as the wicked and ferocious power that it is. Bird states: "The law puts a spotlight on sin with dual effects. On the one hand, the law provides sin with a platform to ply its trade as a merchant of death. But on the other hand, the law exposes sin for what it truly is and highlights the full measure of its brutality."<sup>130</sup>

(3) Paul in vv. 14-25 elaborates on sin's work in bringing about transgression through the law.

(a) The law is spiritual, meaning it is in harmony with God (of the Spirit) and has a spiritual purpose, but we humans (Paul refers to himself as a representative person) are not that way. We are "fleshly," oriented away from God, in that we have been "sold

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<sup>129</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:441.

<sup>130</sup> Bird (2016), 241.

under sin." This is mankind's condition in Adam, not in Christ (6:2, 6-7, 11, 14, 17-18, 22). (1 Corinthians 3:1 shows that Christians can *choose* to be "fleshly," can fail to appropriate their emancipation [see also, Rom. 6:12-13], but that is different than never having been emancipated.)

(b) Speaking from that prior Adamic perspective of enslavement to sin,<sup>131</sup> Paul says that, though part of him realizes the goodness of the law and longs to obey it, he winds up transgressing the law because the sin (or sinful inclination) that dwells within him pulls him into disobedience. Sin keeps that part of him that wants to obey from taking over the mind and will to the extent that it can effectively and consistently direct the body to do what is good. His body is thus under the dominion of sin (sinful passions), "captive" to its rule (v. 23), with the result that it is a "body of death" (v. 24 – under sin's condemnation).

(c) As Paul looks back on his pre-Christian sin, with the post-Christian knowledge that from the time of Christ mercy was no longer available under the old covenant, he expresses the anguish of a condemned man. Who will save him? Thanks be to God through the Christ who saved him.

(d) Verse 25b simply recaps the dividedness of the "I" portrayed in vv. 15-23. His mind, at least part of it, is committed to the law of God, but the flesh is committed to the law of sin.

(4) To repeat the quote from Dunn, "The issue of personal responsibility [Paul] tried to resolve by depicting 'sin' as a power which fully masters the fleshly 'I' (7.14), without really denying the 'I' 's part in the evil it does or exculpating its failure to do the good (7.14-23)."<sup>132</sup>

(5) Many are convinced that Paul is here describing his experience as a Christian, but I agree with Gordon Fee when he writes, "There are three matters which seem overwhelmingly to favor the view that Paul is here describing life before and outside of Christ, but from the perspective of one who is now in Christ."<sup>133</sup> These may be summarized as (1) the only questions raised by Paul here have to do with life under the law, not with life in Christ, which clearly is not under the law, (2) the Spirit, who is key to living under the new covenant, is not mentioned, and (3) the description of this person as being sold under sin and thoroughly captivated by it is completely incompatible with Paul's view of life in Christ, which is a victorious life that is empowered by the Spirit and no longer enslaved to sin.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Schreiner states (1998), 386-387, "Present tense verbs do not necessarily indicate 'present' time. . . . In any case, one needs to account for the shift from imperfect and aorist verbs to the consistent use of the present tense in these verses. The most satisfactory answer is that the present tense stresses the condition or state of the person enslaved to sin."

<sup>132</sup> Dunn (1997), 113.

<sup>133</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 511.

<sup>134</sup> See, Fee (1994), 511-515. Moo (2018), 472, states: "I do not deny that advocates of other views can marshal good arguments of their own. But when all the data have been weighed, I think that the balance tilts toward the

(6) Some commentators object to the view that Paul is speaking of a pre-Christian experience because they claim the mind of a non-Christian is incapable of delighting in God's law and desiring to obey it. I think that is incorrect.

(a) That Paul and other pious Jews of his day sincerely sought to do what was required of them is evident from Rom. 10:2 ("For I testify about [the Israelites] that they have zeal for God . . ."). Paul's sincerity of faith is obvious in Phil. 3:6 where he says that with regard to righteousness rooted in the law, he was faultless (i.e., an exemplary Jew). Indeed, even some Gentiles obey some of the law of the heart (Rom. 2:14-15).<sup>135</sup>

(b) When Paul says in Rom. 8:7-8 that the "mindset of the flesh" is hostility toward God and is unable to be subject to the law of God, he does not mean that non-Christians cannot know or desire the good. Rather, he means that, *in sum*, they are innately hostile to God. In other words, considering all aspects of their being, they are oriented toward themselves and their own gratification rather than toward God and others. So "mind" and "mindset" in 8:5-8 is more comprehensive than "mind" in 7:23, 25 (different words – *nous* in ch. 7 and *phronēma* in ch. 8); it speaks of a person's total orientation, not simply of that rational part which desires the good.

(7) Other commentators argue that Paul's descriptions of his pre-Christian life in texts like Phil. 3:2-11 suggest complacent self-satisfaction instead of a despairing struggle to obey as indicated in Romans 7. But as Moo explains:

With respect to the Pharisaic definition of righteousness, "the righteousness of the law," Paul says in Phil. 3, I was "blameless." But this status of righteousness by Jewish standards does not rule out some degree of frustration in not fulfilling the divine standard, particularly since in Rom. 7 Paul is to some extent looking back at this failure to meet God's demands from his new, Christian understanding of those demands – much as a new convert will be able to look back at his or her pre-Christian existence and find there inner conflict, frustration, and despair that perhaps were not as clear at the time.<sup>136</sup>

(8) The fact Paul is here speaking of the non-Christian's experience does not mean that Christians do not struggle with sin. As I have already stated, as long as we live in this overlap of ages, in this time before the Second Coming, the new man in Christ continues to be subject to the influences of the powers of the old age. We still are pulled, tempted to live in Adam, and we must continually resist that temptation. Thus, Peter in 1 Pet. 2:11 warns the saints "to abstain from fleshly desires which war against the soul." But we do so as people who have been freed from enslavement to sin and who live in the power of the Spirit, as Paul will emphasize in chapter 8. The

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interpretation of the *egō* in these verses as unregenerate."

<sup>135</sup> See, Schreiner (1998), 388.

<sup>136</sup> Moo (2018), 474.

battle now can be waged on a different plane. We are not the same person in a new situation; we are a new person in a new situation. Schreiner states: "Christians, precisely because they have not yet experienced full liberation from sin, are conscious of the continuing presence of sin in their lives. We should not conclude, however, that believers are utterly helpless under the power of sin, for this would leave out Rom. 6 and 8."<sup>137</sup>

#### D. Life in the Spirit (8:1-30)

### 1. The Spirit of Power (8:1-13)

#### *a. Recapping the situation in Christ (8:1-4)*

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life freed you in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what was impossible for the law because it was weakened through the flesh, God [did], having sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering. He condemned sin in the flesh <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

(1) Paul declared in 5:12-21 that, for those who are "in Christ," righteousness and eternal life replace the condemnation and death that was their lot in Adam. In chapters 6 and 7 he took a necessary and important detour to explain why this fact does not lead to lawlessness and to defend his claim that Christians are not under the Mosaic law. In the course of defending his claim that Christians are not under the Mosaic law, Paul asserted that sin actually used the law to bring death to those who were under the law. He then, in the last half of chapter 7, explained the dynamics of the process by which sin used the law to kill those under the law, thereby demonstrating that the blame lay with sin not with the law, which is holy, righteous, and good.

(2) In 8:1-4 Paul reconnects with 5:12-21 by reasserting its conclusion in light of the discussion in chapters 6 and 7. (This reconnection is confirmed by the fact the word translated "condemnation" in 5:16 and 5:18 [*katákrima*] is used only one other time in the NT – in Rom. 8:1.) The conclusion of what he has said over the last few chapters is that there is *no* condemnation for Christians – the death sentence has been removed. We are no longer alienated from God, no longer die physically *as punishment for our sin*, and no longer face eternal separation from God in the final judgment.

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<sup>137</sup> Schreiner (1998), 391.

(3) Christians are not under condemnation because the principle that applies to them, that governs their situation, is "the law of the Spirit of life." Pursuant to that "law," they have received righteousness and life. (I think he calls it the "law of the Spirit of life" rather than the order or purpose or working of God for rhetorical reasons.) As one enters the new age of the Spirit, as one comes under the new covenant, one is freed from the governing principle of the old age, "the law of sin and death." In Christ, the former displaces the latter.

(4) This shift in governing principles is the result of God's having done what was impossible for the (Mosaic) law to do in that humanity was under sin and thus would not yield the obedience necessary for life. God provided righteousness and life by sending Christ to Earth as a human, in the likeness of sinful man, to be an atoning sacrifice. In this sacrifice, God punished sin in mankind (2 Cor. 5:21 – he was made sin for us), so that "the righteous requirement (singular) of the law" may be fulfilled in those who share in Christ's death.

(a) Christ paid the penalty for all sins and thus brought the salvation that the law could not bring. But just as Paul said in 6:4 that our sharing in Christ's death through baptism was that we might "walk in newness of life," so here he says God's condemnation of sin through Christ's sacrifice was that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us. With many others, I think the "righteous requirement" he has in mind is probably the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18; Mat. 22:39; Mk. 12:31).

(b) It is in conjunction with our participation in Christ's saving work that we not only are forgiven but are empowered by the Spirit to obey the moral norms of the law in a new way, on a new plane, a transformation that ultimately will end in our perfect obedience.

[1] As Paul says in Gal. 5:13-14: <sup>13</sup>*For you were called for freedom, brothers; only [do] not [use] that freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be slaves to one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the [command]: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

[2] And as he makes clear in Rom. 13:8-10, love involves specifics: <sup>8</sup>*Owe nothing to anyone except the [well known] to love one another; for the one who loves the other has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>For the [well known] "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, in the [command]: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does not work evil against a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

(5) Those in whom this righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled, those who have died with Christ in baptism, are described as those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(a) "To become a Christian means to be transferred from the realm dominated by the flesh to the realm dominated by the Spirit."<sup>138</sup> "Flesh" and "Spirit" stand over against each other, not as parts of a person but as the powers or dominating features of the two "realms" of existence. Paul writes in Gal. 5:16-18: <sup>16</sup>*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will in no way carry out the desires of the flesh.* <sup>17</sup>*For the flesh desires [things] contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit [desires things] contrary to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do whatever you want.* <sup>18</sup>*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

(b) Moo states:

"To walk according to the flesh," then, is to have one's life determined and directed by the values of "this world," of the world in rebellion against God. It is a lifestyle that is purely "human" in its orientation. To "walk according to the Spirit," on the other hand, is to live under the control, and according to the values, of the "new age," created and dominated by God's Spirit as his eschatological gift.<sup>139</sup>

### ***b. Elaboration on contrasting lifestyles (8:5-13)***

**<sup>5</sup>For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those [who are] according to the Spirit [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace; <sup>7</sup>because the mindset of the flesh is hostility toward God, for it is not subject to the law of God - indeed, neither is it able to be. <sup>8</sup>And those who are in the flesh are not able to please God. <sup>9</sup>But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not of him. <sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>And if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.**

**<sup>12</sup>Now, therefore, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, <sup>13</sup>for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the practices of the body, you will live.**

(1) Non-Christians are described as those who are "according to the flesh" (v. 5) and "in the flesh" (v. 8), and Christians are described as those who are "according to the Spirit" (v. 5) and "in the Spirit" (v. 9). They are in two different realms or spheres. This echoes 7:5 where Paul pointed out that Christians were *formerly* "in the flesh."

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<sup>138</sup> Moo (2018), 508-509.

<sup>139</sup> Moo (2018), 508.

(2) Those "in the flesh" are geared toward the things of "the flesh." They set their "minds," meaning the sum of their direction-determining faculties,<sup>140</sup> on the values of this world; that is their prevailing orientation or commitment. That mindset, that prevailing orientation or commitment, is one of death because it is opposed to God. It does not and cannot submit to God's will because its ultimate orientation is elsewhere.

(a) That does not mean they are as evil as possible or that they cannot recognize and desire the good. Paul desired the good when he was "in the flesh." But when "in the flesh" that desire is overwhelmed by other aspects of one's warped being.

(b) Nor does it mean those "in the flesh" are incapable of obeying any commandments. Rather, it means that their worldly orientation spoils any formal compliance with God's will. As someone has said, however much a husband may be pleased with his wife doing what he wanted, it would all be spoiled if she were in love with someone else.

(c) Moo states:

"Total depravity" does not mean that all people are as evil as they possibly could be – that all people commit every possible sin – nor does it deny that there is knowledge of the good within each person. What is meant rather is that every person apart from Christ is thoroughly in the grip of the power of sin, and that this power extends to all the person's faculties. Paul's language makes this clear: all non-Christians have a "mind-set," a total life-direction, that is innately hostile to God (v. 7). All people, by nature derived from Adam, are incurably bent toward their own good (*incurvatus in se*) rather than the good of others or of God. The various sins to which we are attracted – desire for riches, or station in life, or power, or sexual pleasure – are but different symptoms of this underlying sickness, this idolatrous bent toward self-gratification.<sup>141</sup>

(d) Those in this state may not consciously sense their hostility to God and may deny being his enemy, but the fact remains that friendship with the world is hatred toward God (Jas. 4:4).

(e) It is a mistake to conclude from this inability to please God while "in the flesh" that one is unable to respond to the gospel while "in the flesh." The gospel is the power of God for salvation. It is true that one cannot come to faith on one's own, without being prepared to do so by the grace of God, but God works to enable (not compel) one to accept the gospel. It is through that God-initiated and God-enabled acceptance that the convert changes realms.

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<sup>140</sup> Moo states (2018), 510, "Both words, 'think' in v. 5 and 'mind' in v. 6, come from the same Greek root, a root that connotes not a purely mental process but, more broadly, the general direction of the will, encompassing 'all the faculties of the soul- reason, understanding, and affections.'"

<sup>141</sup> Moo (2018), 511.

(3) Christians, those "in the Spirit," are geared toward the things of the Spirit. Their prevailing orientation or commitment is to the will of God. Those with such a mindset have entered into salvation, and they therefore experience life and peace with God.

(4) Christians are not "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit," since the Spirit of God dwells in us. The Spirit has entered into and taken control of our lives, and we, accordingly, live in that realm in which the Spirit rules, guides, and determines our destiny. There is no such thing as a Spiritless Christian.

(5) Though the Christian's body is mortal (6:12, 8:11), still subject to physical death because of Adam's sin, the Spirit who dwells in us provides us eschatological life because of the righteousness that has been given to us. And this life is not simply our new spiritual life in the present. God, through his indwelling Spirit, will also raise our mortal bodies from the dead on "that day."

(6) Because we are "in the Spirit," we are no longer obliged to live according to the dictates of the flesh, that power of the old age that is opposed to God (like "the world"). But our rescue from "the realm of the flesh" (7:5, 8:9) has not removed us from contact with, and influence from, the flesh. Though we no longer belong to it, we have a continuing relationship to the old realm and can still heed the voice of the flesh.

(7) The structure of v. 12 ("we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to it") leads one to expect Paul to follow with something like, "but we are debtors to the Spirit, to live according to him." Paul abandons that structure, however, to warn his readers. He says that if they live according to the flesh, if they fall back into a lifestyle of the flesh (living like a non-Christian), they will die (in the full theological sense, i.e., they will be lost). On the other hand, if they continue to put to death the misdeeds (lit. practices) of the body by the power of the Spirit, they will have full spiritual life.

(a) You see, there is no salvation without sanctification, not because holy living is the basis of our relationship with God but because it is the result of that relationship. If we refuse to be serious about our service to God, we have chosen not to be serious about God himself. Moo has this to say:

Paul insists that what God has done for us in Christ is the sole and final grounds for our eternal life at the same time as he insists on the indispensability of holy living as the precondition for attaining that life. Neither the "indicative" – what God has done for us in Christ – nor the "imperative" – what we are commanded to do – can be eliminated. Nor can they be severed from one another; they are inextricably connected.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Moo (2018), 517.

(b) It is also important to note that, though we are responsible for this mortification of sins, it is accomplished through the Spirit. Quoting Moo again:

Holiness of life, then, is achieved neither by our own unaided effort – the error or moralism or legalism – nor by the Spirit apart from our participation – as some who insist that the key to holy living is "surrender" or "let go and let God" would have it – but by our constant living out the "life" placed within us by the Spirit who has taken up residence within. . . . Human activity in the process of sanctification is clearly necessary; but that activity is never apart from, nor finally distinct from, the activity of God's Spirit.<sup>143</sup>

## 2. The Spirit of Adoption (8:14-17)

**<sup>14</sup>For as many as are led by the Spirit, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again leading to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. <sup>17</sup>And if [we are] children, [we are] also heirs; heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, since we are suffering with [him] so that we also may be glorified with [him].**

a. Those who are mortifying misdeeds by the Spirit (v. 13) have eschatological life because those who are led by the Spirit, who have the direction of their lives as a whole determined by the Spirit, are sons of God. And life is inherent in being "sons of God," in belonging to God's people, because God's people, his children, are beneficiaries of the promise.

b. The Spirit received by Christians is not a spirit of slavery, one that leads again to anxiety or an unhealthy fear before God as a slave might have before a harsh master, but the Holy Spirit, a Spirit of adoption. The Spirit engenders within us an awareness of our sonship, which awareness we express in heartfelt prayers and praise, represented by the cry "Abba, Father."

(1) The Spirit is so intimately involved in this process that in Gal. 4:6 Paul says the *Spirit* cries "Abba, Father."

(2) Though we are "already" adopted into God's family in terms of status, there is a sense in which that adoption is still future ("not yet"). As Paul points out in 8:23, our adoption is incomplete until we are finally made like *the* Son of God himself, until we receive "the redemption of our bodies."

c. And the fact we are God's children means we are also his heirs. In other words, we are slated to inherit at some future point the blessings God has promised. The statement

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<sup>143</sup> Moo (2018), 518.

that we are "fellow heirs with Christ" reminds us that our inheritance comes only through and in Christ. As Moo says, "We, 'the sons of God,' are such only by virtue of our belonging to *the* Son of God; and we are heirs of God only by virtue of our union with the one who is *the* heir of all God's promises (see Mark. 12:1-12; Gal. 3:18-19; Heb. 1:2)."<sup>144</sup>

d. Paul adds that our participation in the inheritance, our sharing in Christ's glory, is conditioned on faithfulness, which he describes here as suffering with Christ. Those who belong to the Master cannot avoid the tensions and persecutions that were his lot. If the world opposed the teacher, what can his faithful disciples expect? As Jesus said in Jn. 15:18-21 (ESV):<sup>18</sup> *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

### 3. The Spirit of Glory (8:18-30)

**<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy [compared] to the glory that is going to be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup>For the intense expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not willingly but on account of the one who subjected [it], in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will also be freed from the slavery of decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that all the creation groans and experiences birth pains together until the present; <sup>23</sup>and not only [that], but even ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan in ourselves while eagerly awaiting [our] adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, through endurance we eagerly await [it].**

**<sup>26</sup>And likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weakness. For we do not know what is necessary for us to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes [for us] with unspoken groanings. <sup>27</sup>And He who searches the hearts knows what the intent of the Spirit [is], that he is interceding on behalf of saints in accordance with [the will of] God. <sup>28</sup>And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, those who are called according to [his] purpose. <sup>29</sup>For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed with the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; <sup>30</sup>and whom he**

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<sup>144</sup> Moo (2018), 528.

**predestined these he also called; and whom he called, these he also pronounced righteous; and whom he pronounced righteous, these he also glorified.**

a. Paul says that what Christians suffer in this present life is insignificant compared to the glory that is going to be revealed in us.

(1) Here I think he moves beyond suffering directly connected to our confession, to our being Christians, to all suffering attendant to our existence in this fallen world. As Moo points out, "The word Paul uses here refers to 'sufferings' in any form; and certainly the 'travail' of creation, with which the sufferings of Christians are compared [vv. 19-22], cannot be restricted to the sufferings 'on behalf of Christ.'"<sup>145</sup>

(2) Kruse remarks, "Our future glory will include a glorious resurrection body: the present mortal body will die, sown, as it were, in dishonor to be raised in glory (1 Cor 15:43), for when Christ appears he will 'transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:21)."<sup>146</sup>

b. In vv. 19-25, he elaborates on the future revelation of glory mentioned in v. 18 by showing that both creation and Christians suffer at present from a sense of incompleteness and even frustration, and both eagerly yearn for a culminating transformation.

(1) Creation itself, meaning "subhuman" creation, keenly anticipates the unveiling of the true nature of Christians. Though we are "sons of God," that nature is not apparent in this life because we experience suffering and weakness like everyone else. On the last day, however, our real status will be publicly manifested (the revelation of the sons of God). Moo states:

With the majority of modern commentators, then, I think that creation here denotes "subhuman" creation. Like the psalmists and prophets who pictured hills, meadows, and valleys "shouting and singing together for joy" (Ps. 65:12-13) and the earth "mourning" (Isa. 24:4; Jer. 4:28; 12:4), Paul personifies the subhuman creation in order to convey to his readers a sense of the cosmic significance of both humanity's fall into sin and believers' restoration to glory.<sup>147</sup>

(2) The reason the "subhuman" creation is eagerly anticipating this revelation is that it too is not what it should be or what God intended it to be. God subjected creation itself to frustration when he cursed it as a consequence of Adam's sin (Gen. 3:17-18). It was no longer able to be what it was originally created to be. But this decree included the hope, signaled in the promise in Gen. 3:15 that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head, that creation itself

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<sup>145</sup> Moo (2018), 533-534.

<sup>146</sup> Kruse (2012), 341-342.

<sup>147</sup> Moo (2018), 536.

will be freed from its slavery to decay and will enter into the end-time glory to be enjoyed by God's children.

(a) We and it both are getting the "ultimate makeover." As our mortal bodies will be transformed into bodies that are immortal and glorious, so creation itself will be "heavenized," transformed into the new heavens and new earth that will be our eternal abode. See also, 2 Pet. 3:13 and Rev. 21:1-2.

(b) As Kruse observes: "What is clear from all this is that Paul's understanding of salvation is not restricted to humanity but encompasses the whole cosmos. Believers will enter their glorious freedom as children of God, and the cosmos too will be renewed."<sup>148</sup> This same idea of salvation encompassing the cosmos is present in Eph. 1:9-10.

(3) Up to the present, all parts of creation together have been groaning and experiencing birth pains in anticipation of deliverance into glory. And Christians, we who have the Spirit as a down payment on salvation, share this same anticipation. We too groan or sigh inwardly, nonverbally, in that our attitude is one of longing to be free from the corruption and infirmities that are part of life this side of the glorious consummation.

(4) We do so because, just as creation was subjected to frustration "in hope," we were saved "in hope." To be saved "in hope" is to be saved in the expectation of that which is not seen, which is "not yet." Such hope causes us to steadfastly await its object (our resurrection) with eagerness. It sustains us in this overlap of ages (and our endurance, in turn, strengthens our hope – Rom. 5:4). As Paul said in Titus 2:13, Christians live "expectantly awaiting *the blessed hope*, the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." That is the time at which we will receive the eagerly awaited redemption of our bodies (v. 23).

c. Just as that hope sustains us in this present world, helps us to endure, so too the Spirit helps us in our "weakness," in our existence in this overlap of ages. In our suffering and longing to be free from the corruption and infirmities that are part of life this side of the consummation, we often do not know the things for which we should be praying. In suffering we become acutely aware of how limited our perception is because if it were up to us this would not be happening, and yet God is allowing it. This awareness that our desires may not match God's will, may not be what he wants us to pray, could have a chilling effect on our prayers, but Paul says this potential hindrance is overcome by the Spirit's intercession.

(1) The Spirit himself intercedes for us with "unspoken groanings." This is a metaphorical reference to the Spirit's ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts in a manner imperceptible to us. He expresses intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God. Moo remarks, "When we do not know what to pray for – yes, even when we pray for things

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<sup>148</sup> Kruse (2012), 344.

that are not best for us – we need not despair, for we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession 'on our behalf.'"<sup>149</sup>

(2) God, who sees into the inner being of people, where the indwelling Spirit's ministry of intercession takes place, knows that the Spirit is interceding on behalf of saints in accordance with God's will. So Christ intercedes for us in heaven, defending us from all charges that could be brought against us, and the Spirit intercedes for us in our hearts throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of life on earth.

d. In this time of suffering and expectation (vv. 18-25), we are also helped by knowledge of the fact that God, in his providence, works in and through all things to the ultimate good of Christians, described here as those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

(1) Paul explains that the knowledge that all things are being worked for the good of Christians is based on the fact God's purpose and plan is that Christians (who remain faithful) be glorified in the eternal state, where we will love and glorify God forever and be loved and blessed as his children.

(a) Cottrell comments:

God predetermined that those whom he foreknew would one day "be conformed to the likeness of his Son." This is often taken as referring to our spiritual re-creation in the moral image of God as perfectly embodied in Jesus Christ. As such it would include our present and continuing sanctification. But this is not the point. In this context the emphasis is on our final inheritance, the eschatological glory of the redeemed body (vv. 11, 23). "The likeness of his Son" refers to the fact that our resurrection bodies will be like that of Christ. It is the same thought and language as Phil 3:21, which says (literally) that our body "will be conformed to the body of his glory." See also 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18.<sup>150</sup>

(b) Jesus will thus be the "firstborn among many brothers" in that he will be the first of many to be raised from the dead in a glorified body (see Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5 [firstborn from the dead]; 1 Cor. 15:20 [firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep]).

(2) Since Christians are destined for heavenly glory (the assumption being we will want to and therefore will persevere by God's power and protection), we know that our difficulties are not contrary to that purpose. In other words, God is not working against us but for our ultimate good, however tempted we may be to think otherwise given our inability to comprehend his immediate working.

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<sup>149</sup> Moo (2018), 547-548.

<sup>150</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:502-503.

(3) Our knowledge and confidence that all things are being worked for the good of Christians are based in what Paul says in vv. 29-30 ("For"). To paraphrase his words as I understand their meaning: *Those God knew in advance would love him and put their faith in Christ (those he foreknew), he determined in advance (predestined) to resurrect on the last day (conform with Jesus' image), that Jesus might be the first of many who were raised from the dead (the firstborn among many brothers). To that end, he called them (the foreknown believers who are predestined for resurrection glory) to faith through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; Rom. 10:17) and pronounced them righteous by faith. And for those pronounced righteous by faith, he will fulfill what he determined in advance to do – that is, he will glorify them by giving them resurrection bodies of glory like Jesus' body of glory.*

(4) God's calling and our response was simply the actualization of his foreknowledge that we would be Christians, the outworking of what he in his omniscience knew from the beginning. Those called to faith were pronounced righteous, as Paul has said repeatedly of believers, and those who have been pronounced righteous will be glorified in accordance with God's prior determination to do so.

(a) The glorification of believers that Paul has in mind is a future hope, as he makes clear in 8:18 ("the glory that is *going to be* revealed in us"). This glory is identified in v. 23 as our eagerly awaited adoption as sons, which he specifies means the redemption of our bodies.

(b) He refers to this future glorification at the end of v. 30 in the past tense (aorist) because God has already determined to do this for Christians. As we might say, it is a "done deal," the certainty of which is highlighted by referring to it as if it already occurred. It is also possible, though I think less likely in this context, that Paul uses the past tense because our glorification that will be finalized at Christ's return in our resurrection is a process of transformation that has already begun (2 Cor. 3:18).

(5) Cottrell concludes his discussion of the word "foreknow" this way:

In conclusion, the preponderance of evidence shows that "foreknowledge" is not equivalent to election or choosing, and that in 8:29 it refers to nothing more than the cognitive act by which God knew or identified the members of his family (as distinct from all others) even before the foundation of the world. He identified them by the fact that they were (would be) the ones who loved (would love) him, and who met (would meet) the required conditions for salvation. Knowing through his divine omniscience who these individuals would be, even at that point he predestined them to be part of his glorified heavenly family through resurrection from the dead after the pattern established by the firstborn brother, Jesus Christ.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:510-511.

(6) Osborne states:

And the passages on knowing "before the creation of the world" more naturally would connote God's foreknowledge of who would make a faith decision. Therefore, it is better to link this with the emphasis on faith decision in 3:21 – 4:25 (seventeen times) and interpret it as God's knowledge regarding those who would respond in faith to his call (see Godet 1969; Lenski 1945; Cottrell 1975:57-62; Marshall 1969:93; Osborne 1975:178). Marshall says (1969:93), "But justification in Paul is always by faith, and therefore the completion of this chain of blessings applies only where men have faith." So it means that on the basis of divine foreknowledge of each one's faith decision, God chooses those who turn to Christ to be his children.<sup>152</sup>

#### E. The Christian's Assurance Celebrated (8:31-39)

**<sup>31</sup>What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over on behalf of us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring charges against the elect of God? God is the one who pronounces righteous; <sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died and, more than that, was raised up, who also is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>Just as it is written, "On account of you we are being put to death all the day [long]; we are considered as sheep for the slaughter." <sup>37</sup>But in all these things we are completely victorious through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

1. If God has determined from the foundation of the world that the faithful will be with him forever in glory, whose opposition to us can matter? The God who gave his one and only Son on our behalf, who "pulled out all the stops," certainly will not withhold from us the glories of the eternal state. His giving of his Son shows that he is "all in" to bless us. He will not allow any opponent to thwart his intention freely to give eternal glory to the faithful.

2. No charge brought against any saint will stand up (and thus exclude us from God's presence) because God, the one who counts, has already declared us righteous in Christ. In him we are absolutely immune from condemnation (8:1), not because we do not deserve it but because Christ has already taken it.

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<sup>152</sup> Osborne (2004), 221-222.

3. Not only did Jesus die and get raised to life for our justification, but he is in heaven, at God's right hand, presenting himself to God as our perpetual sacrifice (acting as our High Priest). As John puts it so powerfully in 1 Jn. 2:1, "My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. *But if anyone does sin*, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

4. Nothing that Christians may experience in this life, no amount of suffering, will alter God's passionate commitment to our welfare (his love), and therefore nothing we experience in this life will (in itself) alter our eternal destiny. That is why we are completely victorious in all these difficulties through Christ. It is not that we do not experience hardships and death, what on the surface can appear to be defeats, but that those things are unable to deny us what God has planned for us. The faithful are completely victorious not in the sense they stop hardships and death from happening to them but in the sense their destiny is secure despite their happening.

5. I disagree with the claim that these verses mean it is impossible for one to abandon one's faith in Christ. Paul is speaking of the inability of external forces to rob the believer, not denying the continuing free will of the believer. Godet states, "What Paul means is, that nothing will tear us from the arms of Christ against our will, and so long as we shall not refuse to abide in them ourselves; comp. John x. 28-30."<sup>153</sup> William Sanday and Arthur Headlam understand Paul to mean that those who accepted God's call are on course for salvation. "At least no external power can bar them from it; if they lose it, they will do so by their own fault."<sup>154</sup> Cottrell states:

Not surprisingly, we find many commentators attempting to use this passage as a basis for the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. Since the theme here is that *nothing* can separate us from the love of God in Christ, this supposedly means that not even anything we ourselves can do will cause us to lose our salvation.

However, this view ignores the element of personal responsibility implicit in the very theme of justification *by faith*. God's love gives us justification through the blood of Christ, and keeps us justified in the same way, but not apart from our continuing active trust in his blood. In 5:1-11 the role of faith was explicit (5:1-2); here it is implicitly assumed that those whom nothing can separate from the love of God are *believers* who *want* to stay within the family of God.<sup>155</sup>

#### *IV. The Problem of Israel (9:1 - 11:36)*

A significant aspect of why Paul is writing this letter is to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome around the truth of the gospel he preaches so that they may as one support his

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<sup>153</sup> Godet (1977), 333.

<sup>154</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 221.

<sup>155</sup> Cottrell (1996), 1:514. See also, I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1969), 103.

mission work in Spain. In chapters 9-11, he addresses the issue posed by Israel's large-scale rejection of the gospel. If, as Paul's gospel declares, those who reject the gospel are under condemnation, then most Jews are under condemnation because most Jews rejected the gospel. But if most Jews are under condemnation, it seems either that God has gone back on his word to bless the Jews, or something is wrong with Paul's gospel. This is the tension Paul seeks to resolve.

#### A. Tension between God's promises and Israel's plight (9:1-5)

**I speak the truth in Christ; I am not lying – my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit – <sup>2</sup>that the grief in me is great, an unceasing pain in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I would pray that I myself be accursed – [cut off] from the Christ – for the sake of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who are Israelites. Theirs is the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service and the promises; <sup>5</sup>theirs are the fathers; and from them is the Christ, according to the flesh, who is over all things, God blessed forever, amen.**

1. Paul stresses his sincerity and the truthfulness of his concern for Israel, probably because his position on the law and Gentiles had earned him a reputation of being anti-Jewish. He certainly is not anti-Jewish.

2. Paul has great sorrow that so many of his fellow Jews stand under condemnation. They are not receiving the blessings of the promise because they have refused to embrace the gospel of Christ. Paul loves the Jews so much that were it permissible and efficacious for him to pray to be damned that they might be saved, he would pray such a prayer!

3. It is such a shame that so many Jews seemed doomed to hell given the many privileges and promises granted to Israel by God in the OT. These include:

a. adoption as sons – Israel as a nation had been set aside by God from other peoples for blessing and service. God's adoption of Israel conveyed to the nation all the rights and privileges included within the old covenant.

b. the glory – Israel was blessed with the splendor of the divine presence, the glory of God that filled the tabernacle and Solomon's temple. He was with his people in a special way.

c. the covenants – Israel was party to or beneficiary of various covenants mentioned throughout the OT (e.g., Abraham, the people of Israel at Sinai, David).

d. giving of the law – God gave the law to Israel.

e. the [Temple] service – The whole sacrificial and priestly system had been prescribed by God.

f. the promises – The promises of blessing given to Abraham and to the other patriarchs.

g. the fathers – The great men of faith in Israel's history.

h. from them is the Christ – From a strictly human perspective, the Messiah comes from the Israelites. But, of course, there is more to the Messiah's person than his physical descent from Israel. Though the punctuation (and thus meaning) is debatable, Paul most likely refers here to Christ as *God*.

## B. Tension is only apparent (9:6-13)

**<sup>6</sup>But it is by no means the case that the word of God has failed. For not all the ones from Israel are Israel. <sup>7</sup>Nor because they are seed of Abraham [are] all [his] children, but "in Isaac shall seed be called for you." <sup>8</sup>That is, the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; rather, the children of the promise are considered as seed. <sup>9</sup>For the word of promise is this: "At this time I will come and Sarah will have a son." <sup>10</sup>And not only [is it seen in that case] but also when Rebecca conceived [twins] by one man, Isaac our father. <sup>11</sup>For when [they] were not yet born nor practicing anything good or bad – so that God's purpose which is by selection might stand, <sup>12</sup>not from works but from him who calls – it was said to her, "The elder shall serve as a slave to the younger," <sup>13</sup>just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."**

1. The fact most Jews had rejected Christ and thus cut themselves off from God's blessings raised the question of whether God's OT promises to bless Israel had failed. If most Jews did not receive what was promised, then did not God go back on his word?

2. Paul says absolutely not. Yes, God promised distinctive privileges and blessings to "Israel," to his special people, but he has always defined "Israel" in his own way, not in terms of mere biological descent. That is the meaning of "not all the ones from Israel are Israel." The promise of blessing followed the specific lineage of God's choosing, which was a subset of biological descendants. Thus, Isaac, Sarah's son, was the descendant of promise rather than Ishmael, even though Abraham was the father of both and Ishmael was the firstborn. And Jacob was the descendant of promise rather than Esau, the firstborn, even though as twins, they both descended from Isaac and Rebekah *in the same act of intercourse*. God is not obligated to define "Israel," the recipients of his blessings, in accordance with human desires or expectations; he chooses for his purposes. His favor is a matter of his grace, his choosing, and not according to merit, obligation, or human expectation.

3. Note that the reference from Mal. 1:2-3 to God having "loved" Jacob but "hated" Esau is not about emotions toward individuals but refers to God's gracious choosing of Jacob's lineage over that of Esau to be his special people in his plan of redemption (Gen. 25:23). Sandra Richter proposes that it means something like, "Jacob I have chosen as Isaac's heir and therefore heir to Abraham's covenant; Esau I have not chosen as heir."<sup>156</sup> The idiomatic sense of choosing one over the other is evident in Gen. 29:30-31, which states (ESV), "So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he *loved Rachel more than Leah*, and served Laban for another seven years.<sup>31</sup> When the LORD saw that *Leah was hated*, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren."<sup>157</sup> The prophecy that Esau would serve Jacob was fulfilled in the nations that came from them, Edom and Israel, as made clear in God's words to Rebekah in Gen. 25:23.

4. As Paul suggested in Rom. 2:28-29 and 4:11-12, 16 and will make even clearer, God defines "Israel" not according to the flesh, not as including all ethnic Jews, but as those Jews who share the faith of Abraham, as shown by their acceptance of God's testimony about Jesus. In other words, Jewish Christians are "Israel." As we will see in chapter 11, Gentile Christians, those Gentiles who share the faith of Abraham, are grafted into this faithful Jewish root. Paul wrote years earlier in Gal. 3:6-7, "So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'<sup>7</sup> You know, then, that those of faith are the sons of Abraham," and in Gal. 3:29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise."

5. This answer to the charge of unfaithfulness is very important to how one understands chapter 11. If the promises were not addressed to unbelieving Israel, and Paul says they were not, then God's faithfulness is unaffected by unbelieving Jews who do not inherit salvation. There is no need for all physical Jews to be blessed for God to maintain faithfulness. On the other hand, if the promises *were* addressed to all physical Israelites regardless of their faith, then an end-time conversion of the last generation of Israelites would not answer the charge of unfaithfulness regarding all the preceding generations that were lost.

### C. Justice and God's gracious distinguishing (9:14-18)

**<sup>14</sup>What then shall we say? Is there unrighteousness with God? Absolutely not! <sup>15</sup>For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion." <sup>16</sup>Now, therefore, [it is] not [a matter] of the one who wills nor of the one who runs but of God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very thing I raised you up, that I might show in you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup>Now, therefore, he has mercy on whom he wills, and he hardens whom he wills.**

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<sup>156</sup> Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 240 (fn. 19).

<sup>157</sup> See, Robert H. Stein, *Playing by the Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 118-120.

1. The fact God promised his blessings to Isaac's lineage rather than Ishmael's and to Jacob's lineage rather than Esau's, contrary to the ancient custom regarding preference of the firstborn, did not make him unjust.<sup>158</sup> Rather, as he told Moses, the granting of mercy and compassion is not a matter of justice, not something to which a recipient is entitled; it is solely a matter of his good will.

2. I think Jesus made the same point in the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Mat. 20:1-16. You will recall that those who had worked all day complained when the landowner gave them the same amount he gave to those who had worked only part of the day, even though it was the amount for which they had agreed to work. The landowner denied he was being unfair or unjust, saying, "I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

3. Mercy and compassion cannot, by determination or effort, be made a matter of right or entitlement. Such a response cannot be demanded or forced from God but is inherently a matter of his gracious choice. Every Jew understood and accepted that in the case of God's dealing with Pharaoh. He did *not* show mercy and compassion to Pharaoh in fulfillment of his purpose to use Pharaoh to showcase his power and have his name proclaimed in the world, and Jews unanimously acknowledged his right not to do so, his right to give Pharaoh his just deserts. Thielman states:

God's treatment of Pharaoh in Scripture supports the case Paul is making about God's right to show mercy to some people, but not to others.

"For" (γάρ) introduces evidence from Scripture to support the point Paul has just made about God's right to dispense mercy according to his own decision and not on the basis of human activity. The text he cites provides a negative example of God's right to withhold his mercy for his purposes.<sup>159</sup>

4. It is worth noticing that Paul so closely identifies Scripture with God that in v. 17 he substitutes Scripture for God in declaring that "*the scripture* says to Pharaoh." It was God who in Ex. 9:16 told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

5. It is not only God's prerogative to extend and withhold mercy as he chooses but also his prerogative to harden whom he chooses in furtherance of his purposes, as Jews understood and accepted that he did in the case of Pharaoh. There is much misunderstanding today about God's hardening in general and his hardening of Pharaoh's heart in particular. This does not mean that God forced Pharaoh to do wrong and then made him pay for it. It means that part of the penalty for the

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<sup>158</sup> Thielman states (2018), 455, "According to the commonly accepted notions of justice in the ancient world, a person in power who acted justly chose or favored those whom longstanding custom dictated should be chosen, whether it be the elder brother or virtuous candidate."

<sup>159</sup> Thielman (2018), 456-457.

wrongs Pharaoh chose to do was a strengthening of his resolve to rebel so that the contest *he initiated* with God (Ex. 5:1-2) would not end prematurely, would not end before God had achieved all his purposes in that contest.

a. Hardening is a judicial act, the fixing or sealing of a situation arising from a creature's rejection of divine invitation. How this hardening is accomplished is not spelled out. In some cases, it may be that God withholds pressures to change that he otherwise may have graciously provided. In some cases, it may be that God forces one to choose when he knows that the person will choose contrary to the good. In some cases, it may be that God presents the rebel with circumstances that embolden him in his rebellion.

b. I discuss in detail the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in my paper "[A Note on the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart](#)." Thielman states:

The interplay in Exodus 4–14 between God's initiative and Pharaoh's initiative is helpful in understanding what Paul meant when he said that God "hardens" certain people such as Pharaoh. Paul believed that God punished people for their own sin, not that God forced people to sin and then punished them for it. Otherwise, God would be acting nonsensically when he endured the rebellions of the wicked "with much patience" and stretched out his hands in appeal to disobedient Israel (9:22: 10:21). No patience is necessary for enduring the behavior of people doing what one wants them to do, and a lengthy appeal to people not to do what one has designed them to do is obviously fruitless.

When Paul says here, then, that God "hardens" people he must mean that God justly punishes people who, like Pharaoh (Exod 8:15, 32: 9:34) and everyone else (Rom 1:18-3:20; 5:12-19), are already in rebellion against him. God punishes them by calcifying this rebellion, or, to put it another way, he further hardens resistant hearts. This second level of resistance, which God himself initiates, is Paul's concern here, and it corresponds exactly to God's judgment in 1:24, 26, and 28 when he hands people over to their lust, dishonorable passion, and worthless thoughts.<sup>160</sup>

6. So God determines who gets mercy and who does not, who gets compassion and who gets hardened in their unbelief so as to serve his gracious purpose. Believing Israel, true Israel, received the former, and as is made clear in chapter 11, unbelieving Israel, Israel according to the

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<sup>160</sup> Thielman (2018), 457-458. Stott (1994), 269-270, likewise remarks:

So God is not unjust. The fact is, as Paul demonstrated in the early chapters of his letter, that all human beings are sinful and guilty in God's sight (3:9, 19), so that nobody deserves to be saved. If therefore God hardens some, he is not being unjust, for that is what their sin deserves. If, on the other hand, he has compassion on some, he is not being unjust, for he is dealing with them in mercy. The wonder is not that some are saved and others are not, but that anybody is saved at all. For we deserve nothing at God's hand but judgment. If we receive what we deserve (which is judgment), or if we receive what we do not deserve (which is mercy), in neither case is God unjust. If therefore anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's.

flesh, received the latter, which hardening God used as an occasion for his name to be proclaimed to Gentiles, to be proclaimed in all the earth.<sup>161</sup>

#### D. God's use of unbelieving Israel does not make them blameless (9:19-23)

**<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will?" <sup>20</sup>O man, on the contrary, who are you who answers back to God? Will the formed thing say to the one having formed [it], "Why did you make me like this?" <sup>21</sup>Or does the potter not have the authority over the clay to make from the same lump this vessel for honor but that one for dishonor? <sup>22</sup>But what if God, wanting to show the wrath and to make known his power, bore with much patience vessels of wrath, having been made ready for destruction, <sup>23</sup>and in order that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory?**

1. Paul's hypothetical Jew objects that if, as Paul is suggesting, unbelieving Jews have, like Pharaoh, been hardened by God in their unbelief, then there is no basis for God continuing to blame them for that unbelief. They are doing what God wants by not believing and are unable to do otherwise because no one can resist his will. Of course, God does not blame them for not responding when hardened. Their fault was their rejection of his gracious invitation to redemption, which rejection he has strengthened to use them for his good purpose, which purpose he elaborates on in chapter 11. It is the same thing he did with Pharaoh.

2. Paul rebukes this mere man for talking back to God. The man is criticizing God, his maker, not simply for hardening him in unbelief but for having *made him* in a way he disapproves, for having made him into an unbeliever in the first place who consequently was subjected to hardening. But just as a potter has the right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for honor and another for dishonor, so God has the right to make from the same nation of Israel one group for honor (true Israel, believing Israel) and another for dishonor (Israel of the flesh, unbelieving Israel).

3. As Paul made clear in 9:6-8, and as he develops later in chapter 9 and in chapters 10 and 11, God chose to fashion those two vessels from the one nation of Israel by calling them to faith in Christ, which calling produced different responses from individual Israelites. In other words, he made from the one nation, the one lump, two groups of Israelites, two vessels, *not by willing or determining that some would believe and some would not but by saving through a means, faith in Christ, that some would freely accept and others would reject*. He summoned all Israel to believe in Jesus and thereby caused them to separate into two groups, the believers and the unbelievers.

J. Rodman Williams states:

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<sup>161</sup> See, Glen Shellrude, "The Freedom of God in Mercy and Judgment: A Libertarian Reading of Romans 9:6-29," *Evangelical Quarterly* 81.4 (2009), 313-314.

Christ came to save, not to condemn, to bring life, not to bring death. Yet His very coming brings about falling and rising, destruction and salvation. He is the light that draws, the light that repels (John 3:19-21); a precious cornerstone and a stone of stumbling; a fragrance that brings life and a fragrance that brings death. But none of this – the falling, repulsion, the stumbling, the death – is due to God's decree but to *what is in man himself*.<sup>162</sup>

4. In vv. 22-23, Paul says, in essence, "What if, contrary to your (the critic's) characterization, God, though ready to pour out his powerful wrath on unbelieving Israel,<sup>163</sup> those who were made ready for destruction *by their unbelief*,<sup>164</sup> refrained from destroying them to use them in a plan to bring to faith others who from eternity were prepared for glory by their foreknown faith? Nothing about that makes God blameworthy, and it does not excuse unbelief or shift responsibility for one's condemnation to God. Though Cottrell's understanding differs somewhat, his conclusion is apt: "It is important to see that the ultimate purpose of God is not wrath, but mercy. He used vessels of wrath (unbelieving Israel) to accomplish this purpose, but the purpose itself is to make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy."<sup>165</sup>

#### E. The composition of the predestined (9:24-33)

**<sup>24</sup>These he also called, even us, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles, <sup>25</sup>as indeed he says in Hosea, "I will call those not my people my people and her not loved loved; <sup>26</sup>and it will be in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called sons of the living God." <sup>27</sup>But Isaiah cries out on behalf of Israel, "If the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, [only] the remnant will be saved; <sup>28</sup>for the Lord will act on the earth by carrying out [his] word, by limiting [the number]." <sup>29</sup>And just as Isaiah had told beforehand, "If the Lord of armies had not left us seed, we would have become like Sodom and would have been made like Gomorrah." <sup>30</sup>What then shall we say? That Gentiles who do not pursue righteousness acquired righteousness, but righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, did not attain the law. <sup>32</sup>Why? Because [they pursued] not by faith but as from works. They stumbled over the stone of stumbling, <sup>33</sup>just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and the one who believes on him will not be put to shame."**

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<sup>162</sup> J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 21.

<sup>163</sup> Harrison and Hagner (2008), 11:155, state, "[W]hen Paul speaks of 'objects of [God's] wrath (v.22), he has in mind those in Israel who have remained obdurate in opposing the gospel yet are still the objects of the divine long-suffering."

<sup>164</sup> Cottrell (1998), 2:126, contends it is more likely that the verb is middle rather than passive voice, meaning "they prepared themselves" for destruction.

<sup>165</sup> Cottrell (1998), 2:132.

1. Having raised the matter of the predestined (those prepared beforehand for glory, those whose salvation was foreknown by God), Paul elaborates on the group's composition. Those predestined for this glory, the believers, were called by God (through the gospel), not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles, as God prefigured in Hosea (the church being the fulfillment of OT predictions of a renewed Israel). Yet, as Isaiah foretold, only a remnant of Israel will be saved, and even that would have been wiped out but for God (in calling them to faith).

2. The fact of the matter is that Gentiles, who as a class were not seeking a righteous status before God, acquired the righteousness that is received through faith (through their acceptance of Christ). Jews (physical Israel), on the other hand, who pursued the Mosaic law that promised righteousness (to those who fully obey), for the most part did not attain the real blessing of that law (which was to prepare them for faith in Christ – Gal. 3:24) because they pursued it as though the commands were the basis of their relationship with God. The works of the law became the basis of inheritance, rather than a pointer to faith, which caused them to reject faith in Christ as the exclusive source of righteousness. Their exaltation of the Mosaic law hindered their acceptance of Christ as the end or culmination of the era of the Mosaic law. And this too was predicted in Scripture.

#### F. Israel's ignorance of the righteousness of God (10:1-4)

**Brothers, as for me, the desire of my heart and the prayer to God for them is for salvation. <sup>2</sup>For I testify about them that they have zeal for God but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup>For not knowing the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**

1. Paul's heartfelt desire and his prayer to God is that his fellow Jews might experience the salvation that has been made available in the gospel. They are lost because, though they have a praiseworthy devotion to God, that zeal is not driven by knowledge; it is misdirected.

2. Proverbs 19:2 says, "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge." As John Stott comments, "Sincerity is not enough, for we may be sincerely mistaken. The proper word for zeal without knowledge, commitment without reflection, or enthusiasm without understanding, is fanaticism. And fanaticism is a horrid and dangerous state to be in."<sup>166</sup>

3. Their zeal was misdirected because they did not submit to God's righteousness, to his saving work of bestowing a righteous status on those who believe in Christ. They resisted that work not only because they did not recognize God's righteousness when it arrived in Christ but also because they were too narrowly focused on seeking a righteousness in connection with their obedience to the law.

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<sup>166</sup> Stott (1994), 280.

4. The Jews' pursuit of righteousness on their own, based on the law, is wrong because with the coming of Christ the authority of the Mosaic law is, in some basic sense, at an end. Christ is the "goal" of the law, that which the law anticipated and pointed toward, and as such, his coming brings the era of the Mosaic law to a close. His inauguration of the new era was the fulfillment or culmination of the old covenant.

a. After the coming of Christ, those who seek to relate to God under the Mosaic covenant must obey all the commands of that covenant because the sacrifices provided thereunder are no longer recognized. (Gal. 5:3 – And I testify again to every man who gets circumcised, that he is under an obligation to obey the whole law.) Jesus, the true sacrifice behind the sacrifices prescribed in the law, has now appeared and is the only sacrifice for sins available.

b. As I said earlier, the "law," as the complete set of commands under the Mosaic covenant, is no longer in force. That is clear here and in texts like Gal. 3:23-25, and Heb. 7:11-14. It also is clear from the fact specific regulations that were part of the Mosaic law – such as Sabbath regulations (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6), food laws (Rom. 14:1–15:13; 1 Cor. 10:23–11:1), and circumcision (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 11-12, 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2) – are said to be no longer binding. That is why Paul, a Jew, could declare that he was not under the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:20).

c. But the moral norms included among those commands have continuing validity and find full expression under the new covenant. Thus, Paul in Eph. 6:2 commands children to "honor your father and mother," quoting from the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16. The Ten Commandments also are reflected in NT commands and prohibitions against idolatry, swearing of oaths, murder, adultery, stealing, slandering, lying, and coveting. And many other commands issued by Spirit-inspired writers in the NT are based on OT commands outside the Ten Commandments.

d. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law, centered in love, that is the "law of Christ." 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 (with 5:14).

5. By ending the era of the Mosaic law, during which time God was dealing mainly with Israel, Christ has made righteousness available for everyone who believes, both Jew and Gentile. In other words, since his coming, one can be saved *as a Gentile*. The people of God are no longer marked by submission to the Mosaic law.

## G. Contrasting ways of righteousness: law and gospel (10:5-13)

**<sup>5</sup>For Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law, "The man who has done them will live by them." <sup>6</sup>But the righteousness [that is] by faith speaks thus, "Do not say in your heart, `Who will go up into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup>or `Who will go down into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup>But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we preach). <sup>9</sup>Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart one believes resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses resulting in salvation. <sup>11</sup>For the scripture says, "No one who believes on him will be put to shame." <sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same one is Lord of all, being rich toward all who call on him. <sup>13</sup>For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."**

1. Paul elaborates on this righteousness that is by faith apart from law (see 3:21), this righteousness that is available for Jew and Gentile alike. The righteousness that is from the law is that right standing with God that is bound up with the law and one's own works (citing Lev. 18:5). It is the righteousness that Israel had pursued but not attained (9:31-32a, 10:3) and which Paul says in Phil. 3:9 he discarded in favor of the righteousness of God. Since law-based righteousness is work-based righteousness, it is illusory because no human renders perfect obedience.

2. In contrast, the righteousness based on faith warns people (it being personified as speaking through Scripture on its behalf) not to claim that the saving word about Christ is beyond their reach, dependent on something beyond their capabilities.

a. Receiving that word does not require one to ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down, because Christ already descended to earth in the incarnation; nor does it require one to descend into the abyss, to raise Christ from the dead, because Christ already rose from the dead.

b. Just as God graciously made known to Israel the way of life under the old covenant (Paul refers to Deut. 30:11-14), so he has made known to Jew and Gentile alike the way of life under the new covenant – faith in Christ.

3. In contrast to what righteousness based on faith warns people *not* to say, it *positively* asserts that the message about the righteousness of faith, the message preached by Paul and the other apostles, is accessible and understandable, as is evident by its presence in the mouths and hearts of the people of God.

4. That message is in the *hearts* and *mouths* of the saints because righteousness/salvation is received through believing in the *heart* that God raised Jesus from the

dead, which event bears witness to the efficacy of his death, and confessing with the *mouth* that Jesus is Lord.

a. Paul mentions only the belief and confession aspects of conversion because he is paralleling the use of mouth and heart in the quote from Deut. 30:14. He does not mean by this to exclude repentance or baptism.

b. Conversion is a package, and sometimes one or more aspects are mentioned without the others. Paul has already made clear the significance of baptism in conversion in 6:1-11. Indeed, as Baptist scholar G. R. Beasley-Murray notes, "It is universally acknowledged that 'Jesus is Lord' is the primitive confession of faith in Christ that was made at baptism."<sup>167</sup>

5. As Scripture indicates, this salvation is available to all who believe on him, to all who call on his name, whether Jew or Gentile. And as the confession "Jesus is Lord" was associated with baptism, we see elsewhere in the NT that "calling on his name" is associated with baptism.

a. Peter on the Day of Pentecost cited this same text from Joel in Acts 2:21: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall *be saved*." When the crowd asks him what they must do, he tells them in Acts 2:38 to "repent and *be baptized*," exhorting them in 2:40, "*Save yourselves* from this crooked generation." Luke states in 2:41 that those who received Peter's word were *baptized*, "and there were *added* that day about three thousand souls." He makes clear in 2:47b that those "added" to their number were "those *being saved*."

b. Ananias announced to Paul in Damascus in Acts 22:16, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, *calling on his name*."

c. Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:21 that the saving water of the flood is a type, the antitype of which (the thing it symbolizes), Christian baptism, now saves them. He adds that the saving effect of baptism is related not to some physical effect of the water, a removal of dirt from the flesh, but to the fact baptism, being immersed in penitent faith in Jesus' name, is either an appeal (RSV, NASU, NAB, NRSV, ESV) to God for a good conscience or a pledge (HCSB, NIV, NJB, NET, CSB) to God to maintain a good conscience. It is an expression of the human heart directed to God.

#### H. "Israel's" rejection of the gospel (10:14-21)

**<sup>14</sup>How then can they call on [one] in whom they did not believe? And how can they believe [on one] whom they did not hear? And how can they hear without one preaching? <sup>15</sup>And how can they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How welcome are the feet of those proclaiming good news of good**

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<sup>167</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 61.

things!" <sup>16</sup>But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who believed our message?" <sup>17</sup>So then, faith [comes] from hearing, and hearing [comes] through the word of Christ. <sup>18</sup>But I say, did they not hear? On the contrary, "their voice went out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." <sup>19</sup>But I say, did not Israel know? First, Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by a non-nation; by a senseless nation I will make you angry." <sup>20</sup>And Isaiah is bold and says, "I was found by those who do not seek me; I became visible to those who do not ask [for] me." <sup>21</sup>But concerning Israel he says, "All the day [long] I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

1. Picking up on the fact salvation is available to all who will call on the Lord, Paul says that people cannot call on him if they do not believe in him. They cannot believe in him if they do not hear the word that proclaims Christ, and that word will not be heard unless someone preaches it. And since a preacher is nothing more than a herald, one entrusted by another with a message, preaching cannot happen unless someone sends the preachers.

2. The importance of preaching is confirmed by the passage in Isaiah ("How welcome [or beautiful] are the feet of those proclaiming good news of good things!"), but this passage also implies (via "proclaiming good news") that those preaching the gospel are the messengers of God. They have already been sent out by him.

3. In v. 16 Paul focuses on the Jews, as is clear from the reference to "Israel" in v. 19. "Not all" is an understatement meaning "only a few." The fact of the matter, as confirmed by Isaiah, is that only a relatively small number of Jews put their faith in Christ.

4. Having interjected in v. 15b-16 a word about Israel's failure, Paul in v. 17 reconnects with vv. 14-15a. Faith comes from a certain kind of hearing, and that kind of hearing comes only through the "word of Christ," the gospel message.

5. And the Jews did in fact hear the gospel message. Just like God's revelation in nature, Paul says the voices and words of Christian preachers have spread over the world. Paul says that hyperbolically to mean that the gospel had been preached so widely that Jews everywhere (not every Jew) had heard about it.

6. This Jewish "hearing" of the gospel was not the hearing of a message they could not understand. Not at all. As Moses and Isaiah indicated, the gospel was grasped by a non-nation, a senseless nation, by those who were not seeking or asking for God. The Jews therefore cannot justifiably plead lack of comprehension. Their lack of comprehension was willful – God appealed to them, but they were stubborn and obstinate. As Cranfield notes:

The excuse of ignorance cannot be sustained. But it is to be noted that Paul is not withdrawing what he has said in vv. 2-3. The truth is that in one sense they know and in another sense they do not know. They have been the recipients of God's

special self-revelation, and yet they have been uncomprehending. . . . The ignorance which is blameworthy has been characteristic of them; but the ignorance which would have constituted an excuse they cannot claim.<sup>168</sup>

#### I. God's gracious selection of a remnant of Israel (11:1-10)

**I ask, therefore, did God reject his people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, from seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>God did not reject his people whom he foreknew. Or do you not know what the scripture says in [the section about] Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? <sup>3</sup>"Lord, they killed your prophets; they tore down your altars; I alone was left, and they are seeking my life." <sup>4</sup>But what did the divine utterance say to him? "I reserved for myself seven thousand men who did not bow a knee to Baal." <sup>5</sup>Therefore, so also in the present time a remnant has come into being according to a selection of grace. <sup>6</sup>But if by grace, [it is] no longer from works, for otherwise grace no longer is grace.**

**<sup>7</sup>What then? What Israel seeks after, this it did not obtain, but those selected obtained [it]. And the rest were hardened, <sup>8</sup>just as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of bewilderment, eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear, until this very day." <sup>9</sup>And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution to them; <sup>10</sup>let their eyes be darkened so that [they] do not see, and bend their backs continually."**

1. In reporting Israel's rejection of the gospel, Paul is not suggesting that God went back on his promise to bless Israel. Not at all. The rejection by Israel is not total. Some Jews, such as Paul, are among those receiving God's promised blessings in Jesus Christ.

2. God did not reject his people (whom he foreknew as faithful) because, as Paul said in 9:6-7, "Israel" is not defined by mere physical descent. "True Israel," the Israel of promise, is the remnant chosen by grace from among ethnic Israel (on the condition of faith, not works).

3. Israel as a whole, Israel of the flesh, did not obtain the righteous status it sought, but those who submitted to the righteousness of faith in Christ did obtain it. The rest, the unbelieving, were strengthened in their unbelief, sealed in their rejection of God's invitation so as to serve the divine purpose explained in the next section.

#### J. Unbelieving Jews are not beyond converting (11:11-16)

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<sup>168</sup> Cranfield (1985), 264.

**<sup>11</sup>I ask, therefore, did they stumble so that they might fall? Absolutely not! But by their transgression salvation [comes] to the Gentiles in order to provoke them to jealousy. <sup>12</sup>And if their transgression [means] riches for the world and their failure [means] riches for the Gentiles, how much more [will] their fulfilling [mean]? <sup>13</sup>(I am speaking to you Gentiles.) So then, inasmuch as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry, <sup>14</sup>if somehow I may provoke my kindred to jealousy and save some of them. <sup>15</sup>For if their rejection [means] the reconciliation of the world, what [will their] acceptance [mean] except life from the dead? <sup>16</sup>If the firstfruits are holy, so is the lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.**

1. The purpose of God's hardening of unbelieving Israel was not to fix their fate by freezing them permanently in their unbelief. God has not written them off. On the contrary, the hardening was a temporary measure intended ultimately to convert those Jews by promoting Gentile salvation and thereby provoking the Jews to faith through "jealousy."

2. It was God's evangelism strategy among the unbelieving Jews, his way of reaching others who would respond. After all, if their transgression/failure/rejection of God's demand to believe in Jesus,<sup>169</sup> in which they were temporarily hardened, meant riches/reconciliation for the world, then their doing otherwise, their *fulfilling of the divine demand* by accepting the gospel, will mean something even more, something beyond that; it will mean their salvation, their receiving life from the dead. Unbelieving Jews, therefore, cannot be ignored by the church, which is why he says, "I am speaking to you Gentiles," who may be prone to write them off.

a. Most scholars understand the noun πλήρωμα in v. 12 to refer to the "full number" of Jews who are going to convert to Christ. The word, however, can mean the "act of fulfilling," as it does in Rom. 13:10 (KJV, RSV, NRSV, ESV), which here would refer to their fulfilling the divine demand to believe in Jesus. C. K. Barrett notes, "[S]ome, comparing xiii. 10 (love is the *complete fulfilment* of the law), think that [*plēroma*] means, 'when they fulfill the will of God.' That is, Israel's sin has conferred a benefit upon mankind; so much more will their obedience."<sup>170</sup> Indeed, the standard Greek lexicon gives as a translation option "their (the people of Israel) fulfilling (the divine demand)."<sup>171</sup>

b. I think that better fits the context. Paul says the Jews' transgression means riches for the world and their failure means riches for the Gentiles, referring to the fact their refusal to believe in Jesus energized the mission to the Gentiles ("by their transgression salvation [comes] to the Gentiles"), which brought blessings to the non-Jewish world. So when he says, "how much more [will] their *plēroma* [mean]?" the thought is that, if their rejection of the gospel brought great blessings, how much more will their acceptance of the gospel, their fulfilling of the divine demand,

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<sup>169</sup> Believing in Jesus is a divine demand; see, e.g., Mk. 1:15; Jn. 6:29; 1 Jn. 3:23; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17.

<sup>170</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1957), 214.

<sup>171</sup> Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 830.

result in blessings (by bringing in additional Jewish believers on top of the Gentiles who have come to faith)?

c. That Paul is talking about Jews converting, their fulfilling the divine demand by accepting the gospel, fits with vv. 13b-14. He says he brags about his ministry to the Gentiles in the hope of provoking some Jews (his kindred) to jealousy so that some who are currently unbelieving may be moved to believe.

d. That he is talking about Jews converting is also supported by how I understand v. 15, which states, "For if their rejection [means] the reconciliation of the world, what [will their] acceptance [mean] except life from the dead?" I take this to refer to Jews rejecting and accepting the gospel rather than to God rejecting and accepting Jews, taking the genitives as subjective instead of objective, in which case it repeats the point of v. 12, confirming that *plēroma* there has the sense of fulfilling the divine demand to believe in Jesus. The interpretation is debated, but I agree with Garland's assessment: "*Their rejection* refers to Israel's rejection of God, not God's rejection of Israel. It means that in rejecting Christ and the truth of the gospel, Israel has rejected God. *Their acceptance* is their acceptance of the gospel that leads to their acceptance by God who offers salvation to all based on faith alone."<sup>172</sup>

3. If these unbelieving Jews become (by faith) part of the lump from which the holy firstfruits (probably the patriarchs) were taken, they also are holy. If they become (by faith) a branch of a tree with holy roots, if they are grafted into the Israel of faith, they also are holy (see vv. 23-24).

K. Alienation of Jews does not mean Gentiles are a superior race in God's eyes (11:17-24)

**<sup>17</sup>But if some of the branches were broken off and you, though being a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among them and became a sharer of the rich root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup>do not boast over the branches. But if you do boast, [remember] you do not support the root but the root [supports] you. <sup>19</sup>You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I may be grafted in." <sup>20</sup>Quite right; they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not think haughty thoughts but be afraid. <sup>21</sup>For if God did not spare the natural branches, [perhaps] neither will he spare you. <sup>22</sup>Notice then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who fell but God's kindness toward you, if you continue in [his] kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off. <sup>23</sup>And those also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup>For if you were cut from a naturally wild olive tree and, contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, even more will these, the natural [branches], be grafted into their own olive tree.**

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<sup>172</sup> Garland (2021), 356.

1. It is true that some Jews were removed from the people of God by their rejection of Christ and some Gentiles were added by their acceptance of Christ, but the Gentile must not consider his group superior in God's sight because of this. After all, the church is Jewish at its root; all the apostles and the early Christians were Jewish.

2. Moreover, the differing circumstance of Jews and Gentiles is not about ethnicity or race but about faith. If the Gentile does not continue in belief, he will be cut off just as was the unbelieving Jew. If the unbelieving Jew does not continue in unbelief, he will be grafted back into the people of God (the saved). Thus, as Paul explains in the next section, the hardening of Jews in their unbelief is only temporary to enhance the Gentile mission, so that the increased Gentile conversions will motivate additional Jewish conversions (implying termination of their hardening).

#### L. Understanding God's plan precludes Gentile arrogance (11:25-32)

**<sup>25</sup>For I do not want you, brothers, to be ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a hardening in part has come to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; <sup>26</sup>and in this way all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn ungodliness from Jacob. <sup>27</sup>And this [will be] my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." <sup>28</sup>With reference to the gospel, [they are] enemies on account of you; but with reference to the selection, [they are] beloved on account of the fathers; <sup>29</sup>for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup>For as you formerly were disobedient to God, but have now received mercy by their disobedience, <sup>31</sup>so also they have now been disobedient for your mercy in order that they also may [now] receive mercy. <sup>32</sup>For God enclosed all together in [their] disobedience, so that he might have mercy on all.**

1. Many scholars see this as a reference to a large-scale turning of Jews to the Christian faith at the end time, but I disagree with that. As I said in relation to Rom. 9:6-13, if the promises were not addressed to unbelieving Israel, and Paul says they were not, then God's faithfulness is not called into question by unbelieving Jews who do not inherit salvation. And if the promises *were* addressed to all physical Israelites, regardless of faith, then an end-time conversion of the last generation of Israelites would not answer the charge of unfaithfulness to all the preceding generations that were lost.

2. Paul says that a hardening has come upon part of Israel *until* (and so that) "the *plēroma* of the Gentiles has come in." Whereas in 11:12 the context, in my opinion, strongly favors rendering "the *plēroma* of them" as "their fulfilling," meaning the Jews' fulfilling the divine demand to believe in Jesus, here I think it is best rendered "the fullness of the Gentiles," referring to the number of Gentiles necessary to create the "jealousy effect" on the heretofore unbelieving (and hardened) Jews. This is the way in which "all Israel will be saved."

a. In other words, God's hardening of unbelieving Jews invigorated the Gentile mission, which increased the number of believing Gentiles, which led to Jewish jealousy, which in turn spurred acceptance of the gospel from the currently unbelieving Jews, those having been temporarily hardened. Through this process, God brings to faith in Christ all presently unbelieving and hardened Jews whom he foreknew were part of the faithful Jewish remnant, the "true Israel" of promise, those Jews who had faith like Abraham in that they believed God's testimony about Jesus. It is the means by which God brings to faith and thus saves "all Israel," in the sense of all who were foreknown as true Israel.

b. This is the way in which God chose for his purposes to bring those temporarily hardened Jews to their foreknown faith, and thus it is the way in which "all (true) Israel will be saved." The emphasis of v. 26 is on the means not the totality: "*In this way* all Israel will be saved," not "In this way *all* Israel will be saved." There was never a question as to whether God would save all the faithful Jews, all of true Israel. What was not known, the "mystery" (v. 25), was that he would reach part of that "all" through the process being revealed by Paul.

c. The "fullness of the Gentiles" refers to the faith spreading among the Gentiles to an extent sufficient to produce Jewish jealousy, and the hardening of the Jewish unbelievers was to last only until that time. That this was already being realized is suggested by the fact Paul says in v. 14 that he is hoping to save some Jews by provoking them to jealousy by glorifying his ministry to the Gentiles, and by the fact v. 31 speaks of the Jews *now* receiving mercy.<sup>173</sup>

d. In other words, with the purpose of the Jewish hardening being achieved through Gentiles converting in sufficient numbers to produce Jewish jealousy, the hardening was lifted (or being lifted) and some Jews who were once hardened in their unbelief came (or would come) to faith. But that number remains relatively few. The divine hardening was used to accelerate the mission to the Gentiles *at a particular time* as part of God's purpose to create Jewish jealousy. Since that effect apparently was achieved in the first century, there is no reason to assume that God continued to harden Jewish hearts. Their resistance to the gospel since then need not be attributed to divine hardening.

3. The salvation of all true Israel is by faith in Christ and thus is in accord with the composite reference to Isa. 59:20-21a and 27:9a that Paul gives in vv. 26b-27: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn ungodliness from Jacob. <sup>27</sup>And this [will be] my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." These references point to Christ's first coming, his cross and resurrection, rather than to his second. Christopher Bruno states: "The OT promises of salvation

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<sup>173</sup> There is some uncertainty whether "now" is part of the original text. Moo (2018), 727 (fn. 760) states: "NA<sup>28</sup> and UBS<sup>5</sup> tentatively include  $\nu\upsilon\nu$ , "now," following the potent combination of the primary Alexandrian uncials  $\aleph$  and B and part of the western tradition (the original hand and third corrector of D). In this they are followed by most of the commentators (e.g., Käsemann, 316; Cranfield, 2.585; Fitzmyer, 628; Jewett, 694)." Schreiner (1998), 628, for examples, says "it is surely original."

have been fulfilled through Christ; therefore, Paul views Isaiah 59 as an already fulfilled prophecy that is continuing to be applied to the people of God during his ministry (and beyond). Furthermore, the decisive removal of sin in Pauline theology was clearly accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ."<sup>174</sup> Andrew Das adds:

Nowhere in Romans 11 does Paul connect the salvation of all Israel to Christ's Parousia or second coming. Paul does not even refer to the Parousia of Christ in Romans 9–11. In 11:26-27 he certainly speaks of a Deliverer who 'will come' out of Zion . . . but for Paul those prophecies have already been fulfilled. Christ came from Zion as the Jewish Messiah (9:5). God has already placed in Zion the stumbling stone (9:33). . . . The prophecies Paul cites in 11:26-27 were therefore fulfilled in Christ's *first* coming.<sup>175</sup>

4. These Jews are enemies of the gospel in that they currently reject it, which rejection is for the benefit of Gentiles in that it helps to motivate the Gentile mission. But in terms of God's selection of true Israel, the Israel of faith, which the Jews will show themselves to be part of by converting as a result of the "Gentile effect," they are beloved on account of the fathers. When God called the patriarchs, he promised to bless them and their (faithful) descendants, and his gifts and call are irrevocable.

5. The Gentiles formerly were disobedient to God, but they have now received mercy, in part by the Jewish rejection of the gospel, which invigorated the Gentile mission. That Jewish disobedience that helped to bring mercy to the Gentiles had a second effect of also bringing mercy to the Jews by making them jealous over the Gentile's growing embrace of God and thus motivating them to turn to Christ. As Paul explains in v. 32, for God imprisoned all, Gentile and Jew,<sup>176</sup> in disobedience, meaning he held them in their chosen disobedience as part of his described strategy for having mercy on both groups. As Moo notes, "this 'enclosing' probably involves God's decision to 'confine' people in the state that they have chosen for themselves."<sup>177</sup> He held Gentiles in their disobedience by previewing his wrath through giving them over to the lusts of their hearts, as reported in 1:18-32. The depths to which the Gentiles sunk was part of what made the Jews jealous when the Gentiles embraced Israel's God through their acceptance of the gospel. He held the Jews in their disobedience (rejection of the gospel) by hardening them in their unbelief, as reported in 11:7,

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<sup>174</sup> Christopher R. Bruno, "The Deliverer from Zion: The Source(s) and Function of Paul's Citation in Romans 11:26-27," *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2008), 128 (quoted in Benjamin L. Merkle, "Revisiting Romans 11:26: The Salvation of the Elect of Ethnic Israel" in *Paul's Letter to the Romans: Theological Essays*, Douglas J. Moo, et al., eds., [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2023], 255).

<sup>175</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Jews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 110 (quoted in Merkle [2023], 255).

<sup>176</sup> Moo (2018), 751 states, "Paul is commenting on the process he has outlined in vv. 30-31 (and several other times in his chapter). . . . Considering the corporate perspective that is basic to chap. 11, then, it seems best to think that 'all' refers to 'all the groups' about which Paul has been speaking; for example, Jews and Gentiles. Paul is not saying that all humans will be saved." Cottrell (1998), 2:295, likewise states, "The 'all' in both clauses probably is not intended to refer to every individual as such, but to all in the sense of both *groups*, i.e., both Gentiles and Jews."

<sup>177</sup> Moo (2018), 750. As Cottrell (1998), 2:296, states, "This does not mean he caused them to sin."

25. This led to mercy for the Gentiles through the invigorated mission, which in turn, led to mercy for the Jews through the jealousy effect.

6. A possible alternative understanding of 11:32 is that God enclosed all together,<sup>178</sup> referring to Gentiles and Jews, in their state of disobedience,<sup>179</sup> meaning he held them in "influencing contact" (however conceived) with one another, so that he might work his described strategy that was designed to bring mercy to all, both Gentiles and Jews. The disobedient Gentiles received mercy through the disobedience of the Jews, and this happened that the disobedient Jews might also receive mercy through the once disobedient Gentiles. But this seems an unlikely sense for συνέκλεισεν . . . τοὺς πάντας εἰς ἀπειθείαν.

### M. Doxology (11:33-36)

**<sup>33</sup>O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and incomprehensible his ways! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? <sup>35</sup>Or who has given in advance to him that it will be repaid to him? <sup>36</sup>For all things are from him and through him and to him! To him be the glory forever, amen.**

1. This wonder of God's working that has been revealed just blows Paul's mind. He breaks out in an emotional expression of praise and adoration.

2. God's wisdom and ways of working simply are beyond our comprehension. All we can do as creatures is to receive what he reveals and bow before him in awe. God is not on trial. To him be the glory forever, amen.

## V. Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1-13:14)

### A. The general call to a transformed life (12:1-2)

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<sup>178</sup> As Moo (2018), 750 (fn. 864), "The verb is συγκλείω, meaning, according to its roots, 'close up together' (see Luke 5:6 with reference to fish in a net)." See, BDAG, 952.

<sup>179</sup> The preposition εἰς "often occurs where one might expect ἐν" (A. Oepke, "εἰς" in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964] 2:433); see also, BDAG, 289. David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig state in *Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 99, "Most grammars recognize that there is considerable overlap between εἰς and ἐν. . . . [T]here are a number of instances where εἰς appears to indicate location or resting place and can be translated 'in.'" Though uncommon in Paul, he occasionally uses εἰς with a locative sense, see, e.g., 2 Cor. 1:21, 10:16, 11:10; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 3:16; 1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Thess. 2:4. Notable examples of the locative sense outside the Pauline corpus include 1 Pet. 5:12, Lk. 10:36, and Acts 19:22.

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – living, holy, and acceptable to God – which is your understanding service.<sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewal of the mind so that you may ascertain what is the will of God, the thing that is good and acceptable and perfect.**

1. The "mercies (or compassions) of God" refers to all that Paul has written about God's working, which he just summarized in 11:30-32. He urges them, in light of those mercies or compassions, to present their *bodies* as a "living sacrifice," meaning they are willingly to offer in devotion to God consecrated lives, lives in which the sinful practices of the *body* have been put to death by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). They are to use their bodies honorably and direct them in paths of righteousness as an expression of gratitude and submission to God.

2. Paul says that this kind of living is their "understanding (or reasonable) service" to God, meaning it is the kind of service that ought to be offered by rational or reasoning creatures in response to the God of mercy.<sup>180</sup> In Peterson's words, "Paul is talking about the service rendered by those who truly understand the gospel and its implications for everyday life."<sup>181</sup> There is something grossly inappropriate about rational creatures, those capable of grasping who God is and what he has done, not serving him wholeheartedly, as described in Deut. 10:12-13. This is reflected in Isa. 1:2-3, where the Lord declared: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: 'Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. *The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.*'"<sup>182</sup>

3. There are translation issues regarding both words of the phrase (λογικὴν λατρείαν) that I have translated "understanding service."

a. *Logikos* may mean spiritual, rational, appropriate, or reasonable.<sup>183</sup> Speaking of its use in 1 Pet. 2:2, Schreiner states: "The word *logikos* is translated by the NIV and understood by many to mean 'spiritual.' Usually, however, in Greek literature the term refers to that which is rational or reasonable. It is not equated with the term 'spiritual,' even though it overlaps with it [citations omitted]."<sup>184</sup>

b. *Latreia* may mean either service generally or worship specifically.<sup>185</sup> Most commentators understand *latreia* in this verse as "worship," but I agree with Everett Harrison that

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<sup>180</sup> H. Strathmann describes it in "λατρεύω" in Gerhard Kittel ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:65, as "a service of God which corresponds to human reason."

<sup>181</sup> Peterson (2017), 439 (fn. 15).

<sup>182</sup> See also, Jer. 8:6-7.

<sup>183</sup> See, e.g., Mounce (1995), 231 (fn. 8).

<sup>184</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, CSC (Nashville: Holman, 2020), 103.

<sup>185</sup> Morris (1998), 434 (fn. 11), for example, states, "λατρεία may mean either 'service' or 'worship'; both are appropriate in response to the deity." The sense of "service" is probably intended in Jn. 16:2b, where Jesus tells the disciples that the time is coming when people who kill them will think they are "offering service to God," meaning

"service" seems more appropriate because service "covers the entire range of the Christian's life and activity,"<sup>186</sup> which fits better with the breadth of Paul's demand. Worship, rightly conceived, is narrower than that. It refers to expressions of reverence and adoration that have a distinctively Godward orientation, acts of interpersonal communion with God. As theologian Edmund Clowney states, "In private, as in public, a worship activity such as prayer is distinguished from the regular activities of life. Though we do all to the glory of God, not all that we do is the special activity of worship."<sup>187</sup> As explained by Nicholas Wolterstorff:

There are other ways of acknowledging God's distinctive excellence – for example, by obeying God's injunction to love our neighbors as ourselves and by participating in God's cause of bringing about justice. But these ways of acknowledging God's excellence are not worship of God. Why not? What is distinctive of worship as a mode of acknowledging God's excellence?

What is fundamentally distinctive, I would say, is the *orientation* that characterizes worship. In our everyday lives we are oriented toward our tasks, toward our fellow human beings, toward what they do and make, toward the natural world. In worshipping God, we turn around and orient ourselves toward God. We turn away from . . . attending to our neighbor, and so forth, in order to attend directly to God. We face God. In worship, our acknowledgement of God's excellence is *Godward* in its orientation.<sup>188</sup>

c. Peterson states, "A better translation might be 'your reasonable service' or 'your understanding service.'"<sup>189</sup> The standard Greek lexicon suggests "thoughtful service" as a translation for λογικὴν λατρείαν.<sup>190</sup> The phrase is rendered "reasonable service" in the KJV, ERV, NKJV, NET, LEB, and in the footnote in HCSB and CSB footnote; "rational service" in the ESV footnote; and "spiritual service" in the ASV and WEB. CEV expresses the point with, "That's the most sensible way to serve God." I think "understanding service" best captures the intent.

4. Paul characterizes the proper response to God by rational beings *metaphorically* as a "sacrifice," using the oxymoron "living sacrifice," because, as with literal

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doing his will.

<sup>186</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "Romans" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:128.

<sup>187</sup> Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 126.

<sup>188</sup> Wolterstorff, xviii. See also, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 24. Theologian Jack Cottrell similarly defines worship proper as "activities directed specifically and exclusively toward God in interpersonal adoration and communion." Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 448. Another noted philosopher of religion, Brian Leftow, defines worship as "a form of address" to a deity. Brian Leftow, "Naturalistic Pantheism" in Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, eds., *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 71. If "form of address" includes communicative acts, his definition is in line with that of Wolterstorff. See also, Ninian Smart, *The Concept of Worship* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 11 ("In worship one addresses the focus of worship"), 50 ("In worshipping God one addresses him").

<sup>189</sup> Peterson (2017), 439.

<sup>190</sup> BDAG (2000), 598.

sacrifices, that response is required by God and pleasing to him. I think it is a mistake to separate the word sacrifice from its modifier (living) and then use the worship connotation of a literal sacrifice to claim that Paul was describing all of Christian living as worship in a literal or proper sense. For more on this, see Ashby Camp, "[Reflections on Worship](#)."

5. If one applies the word worship to Christian living generally, one is then forced to distinguish between broad/general/indirect worship and narrow/specific/direct worship, the latter being worship proper, those distinctively Godward acts done at specific times and places. Thus, J. Vernon Bartlet concludes, "Worship has two senses, a wider and a stricter. The wider, expressing a man's devoutness in all his living, is equivalent to piety; the narrower, denoting specific forms of devotion, personal or social, is nearly synonymous with cultus."<sup>191</sup> A more current example is J. Richard Middleton, who contrasts worship "in the narrow sense of our focused attention given to God in praise and prayer" with "a broader sense of worship, corresponding to all that we do in obedience to God."<sup>192</sup> Wayne Grudem likewise contrasts worship as "applied to all of a Christian's life," what he calls the "broad sense," with "worship in a more specific sense," which refers "to the music and words Christians direct to God in praise."<sup>193</sup> The distinction remains but simply gets renamed; one is left with two species of worship instead of worship and service.

6. Christians are not to be molded to fit the godlessness of this age, but rather we are to be transformed by a Spiritual reprogramming of our minds so that we can ascertain the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God by which we are to live. Though the Greek word (δοκιμάζω) usually has the sense of "test, examine, approve," in 12:2 it shades into "ascertain" or "discern," which is how it is translated in the NEB, NJB, NRSV, ESV, and CSB. As Dunn states, quoting Cullmann, what is in view in Rom. 12:2 is "the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgment at each given moment."<sup>194</sup> This reprogramming is an ongoing, lifelong process. In the vernacular, we constantly will be "getting our mind right." The more we think as God wants us to think, the greater insight we will have into how God wants us to live. We will be able to comprehend more clearly and deeply God's moral direction.

## B. Humility and mutual service (12:3-8)

**<sup>3</sup>For I say, through the grace that was given to me, to all who are among you, not to think greater of yourselves than is necessary to think but to think so as to be sensible, as God distributed to each a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup>For just as in one body we have many members, but all the members do not have the same**

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<sup>191</sup> J. Vernon Bartlet, "Worship (Christian)" in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 12:763.

<sup>192</sup> J. Richard Middleton, "A New Earth Perspective" in Michael E. Wittmer, ed., *Four Views on Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 74.

<sup>193</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1236.

<sup>194</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 714.

**function, <sup>5</sup>so we, the many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another, <sup>6</sup>but having different gifts according to the grace given to us; whether [it be] prophecy [exercised] in agreement with the faith, <sup>7</sup>or service [exercised] in the serving, or the teacher [gifted] in teaching; <sup>8</sup>or the encourager [gifted] in encouraging; the giver [gifted] in generosity; the leader [gifted] in diligence; the mercy shower [gifted] in cheerfulness.**

1. Part of God's will for our lives is that we not have an inflated view of own importance, especially in relation to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Rather, we are to gauge ourselves in relation to fellow saints by the "yardstick (or standard) of faith" (not the amount of faith) which God has revealed to each of us in the gospel. This understanding of "measure of faith" is preferred by Cranfield, Morris, Fizmyer, Moo, Peterson, and Garland.

a. In other words, faith is the thing that matters, and since we all stand before God through the same faith in Christ, evaluating by that standard eliminates false notions of superiority and inferiority that stratify the body of Christ. That is what is behind the saying the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Garland states:

In the context, [the measure of faith] refers to how they should measure themselves and others (see Matt. 7:2). Paul has argued that every believer alike was under sin (3:9) and that every believer alike is justified through Jesus Christ (4:25; 5:1, 9). Justification by grace becomes the measuring rod that 'should provide the basis for a true estimation of oneself, since it reveals that one is dependent, along with other believers, on the saving mercy of God in Christ' (Harrison and Hagner, p. 186). Therefore, the measure of faith 'is the same for all' (Wright, p. 709). If they are to do any measuring, Christ is the only standard by which they can truly measure themselves.<sup>195</sup>

b. This is preferable, in my view, to taking the term "measure" as a measured quantity of faith that is dispensed by God in different amounts to different individuals. That would promote rather than suppress notions of superiority and inferiority.

2. Paul backs up the exhortation that believers not have an inflated view of themselves by analogizing them to the human body. Christians are all part of the one body of Christ, but the various parts of that body perform different functions. Since all parts contribute to the whole, no particular part should see itself as superior.

a. I agree with Dunn, Jewett, and Hultgren<sup>196</sup> that vv. 6-8 should not be translated as commands but as statements of the diversity of gifts within the body (see NRSV). That judgment is reflected in the translation given above. Jewett states:

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<sup>195</sup> Garland (2021), 390.

<sup>196</sup> Dunn (1988), 725; Jewett (2008), 744; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 444-445.

Most translations and commentaries assume that the participle ἔχοντες ("having") should be taken as the beginning of a new sentence, with the subsequent list of charismatic gifts understood in an imperatival sense. As Dunn has shown, it is more appropriate grammatically and in terms of the content of the subsequent verses to take vv. 6-8 as a continuation of the body metaphor in vv. 4-5, which means that the list of gifts is descriptive and exemplary.<sup>197</sup>

b. Paul notes that prophecy is exercised "in agreement with the faith,"<sup>198</sup> in a way consistent with the Christian faith. This probably refers to the fact that true prophecy is always consistent with the Christian faith, in accordance with the teaching of the apostles. Perhaps it refers to the fact that in congregational assemblies prophecy is to be given in accordance with the conditions Paul mentioned in 1 Cor. 14:29-33a, which flow from love that is the center of the Christian faith: <sup>29</sup>*And let two or three prophets speak and let the others discern.* <sup>30</sup>*And if [something] is revealed to another who is sitting, let the first be silent.* <sup>31</sup>*For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be encouraged.* <sup>32</sup>*And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets,* <sup>33</sup>*for God is not [a God] of disorder but of peace.*

c. I do not believe the Spirit is choosing to give the church today all the same gifts he gave to her in the first century. In other words, I believe some of the gifts have ceased, including the gift of prophecy. Regarding prophecy, consider the following:

(1) There is no indication that all gifts will continue until the consummation, so there is no reason *to insist* that they have. Since the Spirit distributes the gifts as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11), it is certainly possible that he chose to stop giving certain gifts. This kind of change is not unprecedented. It was widely believed by Jews that the gift of prophecy ceased not long after the last book of the OT was revealed.<sup>199</sup>

(2) Eph. 2:20 indicates that both apostles and prophets played a foundational role in establishing the church. We know that the apostles passed from the scene after fulfilling that role, so one would expect the same thing to happen to the prophets. This is consistent with the concept of a foundation. They were the instruments of God's new revelation, and once that foundation had been laid, their job was complete; the church would then build on their message.

(3) The precedent of the OT supports the idea that the completion of NT Scriptures would have an effect on the work of the Spirit, particularly with regard to revelatory gifts. As mentioned, it was generally recognized in Judaism that divine inspiration ceased not long after the last book of the OT was revealed.

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<sup>197</sup> Jewett (2008), 744.

<sup>198</sup> See, Cranfield (1979), 2:621; Fitzmyer (1993), 647; Stott (1994), 327; Hultgren (2011), 444; BDAG (2000), 67; NCV, EHV, LSB, and NIV footnote.

<sup>199</sup> John Barton states in "Postexilic Hebrew Prophecy" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:495, "[B]y the NT period, it was widely believed that the gift of authentic prophecy had died out in Israel – though its restoration, promised (it was felt) in Joel 3 – Eng chap. 2, was eagerly hoped for."

(4) This in no way means that God is any less powerful today than yesterday. It is not a matter of power but a matter of divine choice. For more on this, see Ashby Camp, "[Some Thoughts on the Cessation of Miraculous Gifts.](#)"

3. Of course, Paul's point has nothing to do with the duration of the spiritual gifts. He is supporting his exhortation that Christians not think too highly of themselves, especially in relationship to one another, by stressing that they are all parts playing roles in service of the whole.

### C. General ethical counsel (12:9-21)

#### 1. Emphasis on Christian relationships (12:9-16)

**<sup>9</sup> Love is to be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love; show the way to one another in the matter of respect. <sup>11</sup> Do not be lazy in eagerness; be fervent in spirit; serve as a slave to the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be steadfast in affliction; persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share in the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Be like-minded toward one another; do not think haughty thoughts but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.**

a. Christian love is to be genuine, not fake. We are not to be two-faced where we act committed to another's welfare but then seek to harm them or simply harm them through neglect.

b. We are to hate (exceedingly) what is evil and cling to what is good. It is not virtuous to be apathetic toward or accepting of wickedness, and it is not loving to ignore evil in our brothers' and sisters' lives. Real love requires us not to wink at such things.

c. We are to have a family-like affection (or devotion) toward one another, and we are to show the way to one another in the matter of respect. We are not to treat any brother or sister as though they are "a nobody."

d. We are not to be lazy in eagerness, meaning lacking in zeal; rather, we are to be fervent in spirit. We are not to be "ho hum" about serving the Lord.

e. And our zeal is to be rightly directed (recall 10:2 – zeal not according to knowledge). With it, we are to "serve as a slave to the Lord." One aspect of that is being zealous in terms of the will of the Lord as revealed in Scripture, which we become better able to discern through the Spiritual reprogramming of our minds (12:3).

f. We are to rejoice in the hope that is ours in Christ, remain steadfast in the face of affliction, and persevere in prayer (which will certainly affect our doing the others).

g. We are to share our material things with saints in need. We are also to "pursue" hospitality, that is, go out of our way to welcome and provide for traveling brothers and sisters. Keener comments, "In antiquity 'hospitality' meant putting up travelers (without charge) in one's home while they were in town; they would normally carry letters from those trusted by their hosts, attesting that they were to be accepted as guests."<sup>200</sup>

h. We are to bless those who persecute us, meaning we are to call on God to bestow his favor on them. This is the same thing Jesus said in Mat. 5:44 and Lk. 6:27-28.

i. We are to rejoice with our brothers and sisters who rejoice, and we are to weep with those who weep. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 12:26, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together." Genuine love will not respond to a fellow believer's joy with envy or bitterness. And genuine love will cause us to identify so deeply with our brothers and sisters in Christ that their sorrows will become ours.

j. Paul says in v. 16 that we are to "be like-minded *toward* one another" (rather than "among" or "along with" one another), which suggests that his point in this context is that, whatever our social, ethnic, or economic status, we are to view each other with a mutual respect and a mutual appreciation of value and worth. The NEB translated the phrase: "have equal regard for one another" (see also NAB).

k. We are not to think we are too good for "humble duties" (if take adjective as neuter – lowly things) or "lowly people" (if take as masculine), rather we are to associate with them. We are not to have a "big head," not to be wise in our own estimation.

## 2. Emphasis on relationship with the world (12:17-21)

**<sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil; have regard for what are noble things in the sight of all people. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people. <sup>19</sup>Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but give opportunity for the wrath [of God], for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup>But "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing this, you will heap coals of fire on his head." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

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<sup>200</sup> Keener (1993), 439.

a. We are to repay no one evil for evil. And we are to exhibit to the world, in the sight of all people, our regard for noble things, our appreciation for and commitment to things that are good and right and holy and pure. We are to let our light shine in this dark world as disciples of the Lord Jesus. An alternative view is that we are to have regard for what all people see as "noble things" that we might not be needlessly offensive.

b. Though the world is opposed to us, we are to do all we can to live at peace with the world. We must not compromise what God has called us to be and do, but neither can we gratuitously alienate the lost.

c. When we are wronged, we are not to retaliate or seek revenge against the wrongdoer. Rather, we are to allow God to deal with them. Paul is not talking here about using courts to resolve civil disputes with non-Christians; he is talking about personal revenge and punishment.

(1) As he says in chapter 13, governmental authority has been established by God for the administration of justice, so I do not see how it would be against God's will to avail ourselves of it. It is only lawsuits against fellow believers that are wrong (1 Corinthians 6), as those disputes need to be resolved "in house" rather than be submitted to unspiritual judges who do not share the church's view of reality.

(2) Paul did not hesitate to use the rights he had under Roman law. He used the fact he had been illegally beaten to insist that he and Silas be personally escorted out of the jail in Philippi (Acts 16:35-39). He also appealed to have Caesar hear his case rather than allow himself to be handed over to the Jews by Governor Festus (Acts 25:6-12).

(3) Civil litigation is about compensation rather than punishment. Of course, if civil litigation was employed for the purpose of retaliation or punishment that would be a sinful spirit.

d. We are to love our enemies and seek their welfare that we might lead them to be ashamed of their conduct toward us and, perhaps, to repent and turn to the Lord whose love we embody. "Coals of fire" as a metaphor for "burning pangs of shame" may go back to an Egyptian practice of carrying a tray of burning coals on one's head as a sign of contrition, though other suggestions for the origin of the metaphor as a reference to shame have been proposed.<sup>201</sup>

#### D. Submission to secular rulers (13:1-7)

**Let every person be subject to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except by God, and the existing ones have been established by God. <sup>2</sup>So then, the one who opposes the authority has resisted the ordinance of God, and those**

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<sup>201</sup> See Moo (2018), 806 (fn. 255).

**having resisted will receive judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For the rulers are not a cause for fear to good work but to evil. And do you want not to fear the authority? Do good, and you will have praise from him. <sup>4</sup>For he is God's servant to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not wear the sword for nothing. For he is God's servant, an avenger for wrath against the one practicing evil. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, it is necessary to be subject, not only on account of wrath but also on account of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For on account of this you also pay tribute; for they are God's ministers when attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Pay to everyone the debts owed: to the one [owed] the tribute, [pay] the tribute; to the one [owed] the tax, [pay] the tax; to the one [owed] fear, [pay] fear; to the one [owed] respect, [pay] respect.**

1. Part of the holy life we are to present to God in this overlap of ages is our submission to governing officials who have authority over us. Moo states, "One can well imagine Christians arguing: 'The old age has passed away; we are 'a new creation in Christ' and belong to the transcendent, spiritual realm. Surely we, who are even now reigning with Christ in his kingdom, need pay no attention to the secular authorities in this defunct age.'"<sup>202</sup>

2. Paul says that Christians must submit to the governmental authorities because they have been established by God. Moo remarks, "From a human perspective, rulers come to power through force or heredity or popular choice. But the 'transformed mind' recognizes behind every such process the hand of God."<sup>203</sup> To oppose them is to resist God's grant of authority to them for maintaining order in the society, and those who do so will receive judgment. God has established certain institutions in this world, such as marriage and government, which have a positive role to play *even after* the inauguration of the new age.

a. Our submission to the governmental authorities is not conditioned on our liking or agreeing with their laws and policies. It depends only on the fact that they are the governmental authorities, and as such, are God's agents. Peter says in 1 Pet. 2:13-17:

<sup>13</sup> Submit to every human creature on account of the Lord, whether to a king as being supreme <sup>14</sup> or to governors as those sent by him for punishment of those who do evil and praise of those who do good, <sup>15</sup> for this is the will of God: by doing good [you are] to silence the ignorance of foolish men. <sup>16</sup> [Do so] as free people, yet not as those viewing freedom as a cloak for evil but as God's slaves. <sup>17</sup> Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

b. God sometimes brings or allows evil people to come to power for various reasons. Paul has already mentioned (9:17) that God raised up the wicked Pharaoh that God might be glorified through displaying his power against him. And Jesus told Pilate in Jn. 19:11 that he

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<sup>202</sup> Moo (2018), 808-809.

<sup>203</sup> Moo (2018), 815.

would have no authority over him if it were not given to him from above. See also, Dan. 4:17, 25, 32.

c. But God holds these evil rulers accountable for their wickedness. Daniel 4 tells us that God caused the great king Nebuchadnezzar to lose his mind so that he wound up living like a wild animal. It was not until he repented that his rule was restored to him. And though God used the Assyrians to punish Israel and the Babylonians to punish Judah, he poured out his wrath on the wickedness of those nations (e.g., Isaiah 10; Habakkuk 2-3). Their ultimate punishment, of course, will be in the judgment.

d. Because God is the ultimate authority, it goes without saying that Christians cannot obey governmental authorities when to do so would mean disobeying God. As Peter and the other apostles declared to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men!" Otherwise, we would be placing government over God, which is idolatry. Paul does not mention that fact here probably because the issue was whether the saint should submit to the authority of the state at all.

e. There are notable examples in Scripture of this kind of civil disobedience. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys, they refused to obey (Ex. 1:17). When Nebuchadnezzar ordered all his subjects to fall down and worship his golden image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey (Daniel 3). When King Darius decreed that for thirty days no one should pray to any god or man, except himself, Daniel refused to obey (Daniel 6). And when the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused to obey (Acts 4:18 ff.)

f. Moo concludes his discussion of the section this way:

Balance is needed. On the one hand, we must not obscure the teaching of Rom. 13:1-7 in a flood of qualifications. Paul makes clear that government is ordained by God – indeed, that every particular governmental authority is ordained by God – and that the Christian must recognize and respond to this fact with an attitude of submission. . . . On the other hand, we must not read Rom. 13:1-7 out of its broad NT context and put government in a position relative to the Christian that only God can hold. Christians should give thanks for government as an institution of God; we should pray regularly for our leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2); and we should be prepared to follow the orders of our government. But we should also refuse to give to government any absolute rights and should evaluate all its demands in light of the gospel.<sup>204</sup>

3. For the purpose of his argument, Paul assumes that the rulers are not demanding disobedience to God, "that the laws of the state embody those general moral principles that are

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<sup>204</sup> Moo (2018), 826.

taught in the word of God."<sup>205</sup> Thus, he says that the rulers do not cause fear in those who do good, the law-abiding citizen, but in those who do evil, the lawbreakers. If one wishes not to fear the authority, then one needs to do the good that the authority requires, in which case one will be praised. This is because the authority is God's servant intended to benefit the people by maintaining social order.

a. It is clear from this that there is no inherent conflict between government employment and Christian discipleship. God established governmental authority within human society (to bless mankind by providing social order), so one who serves in the government is God's servant. To the extent one fulfills one's role in government consistently with Christian ethics, one is working with God not against him.

b. In Rom. 16:23, Erastus, one of the Christians who sends greetings to the saints in Rome, is identified as a financial officer within the local government of Corinth, the city from which Paul wrote. Likewise, in Phil. 4:22 those "who belong to Caesar's household" are among the Christians who send greetings to the saints in Philippi. Those Christians were members of the emperor's civil-service staff.

4. But one who does evil, who breaks the law, should be afraid because the governmental authority has the power to punish because he (or they) is God's servant, an agent of wrath against the one practicing evil. There is debate over the exact background and significance of the phrase "wear the sword," but according to Keener, "'The sword' refers to the standard method of execution in this period (beheading); in earlier times the ax had been used. Swords were carried in front of Roman officials to indicate their authority over life and death."<sup>206</sup> It is hard to believe in the context of first-century Rome, and against the OT background (Gen. 9:4-6), that Paul did not mean to include the death penalty in the state's arsenal of punishments.

5. Since the governmental authority has been established by God, it is necessary to submit to that authority not only because of potential punishment but also because of conscience; it is sinful to rebel against that authority. Indeed, paying tribute (direct taxes) is even a matter of conscience because authorities are God's ministers when attending to tax collection (or, perhaps more broadly, when attending to government service generally).

6. We are to pay to everyone the debts owed, whether direct taxes, indirect taxes (customs duties, fees, etc.), respect, or honor. Governments restrain anarchy and serve the basic needs of the masses, so it is no justification for withholding payment of taxes that they also use that money for things we cannot endorse. That is their responsibility. But, of course, in a system of government that gives us a voice in selecting our leaders and influencing their policies, we have an obligation, as stewards of that privilege, to exercise it for the good.

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<sup>205</sup> Moo (2018), 819.

<sup>206</sup> Keener (1993), 441.

## E. Love and the law (13:8-10)

**<sup>8</sup>Owe nothing to anyone except the [debt] to love one another; for the one who loves the other has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>For the [commandments] "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, in the [command]: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does not work evil against a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.**

1. Paul plays off his comment in v. 7 that every debt should be paid, and says the only exception is the debt to love one another. That is the one debt we must never stop owing. As the third-century theologian Origen put it, "Let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love – a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging."<sup>207</sup>

2. If you love your neighbor, you will do him no harm. That means you will not commit adultery, you will not murder, you will not steal, you will not covet, or do anything like that. All these commands are summed up in the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The commands are simply specific ways in which love does no harm, so love fulfills the law in that love does what the law demands.

3. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10; Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. These definite requirements are included within the "law," within the set of commands under the Mosaic covenant. So the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included within that law.

## F. Living in light of the day (13:11-14)

**<sup>11</sup>And [do] this, knowing the [present] time, that it is already the hour for you to be raised from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we [first] believed; <sup>12</sup>the night progressed, and the day has drawn near. Let us, therefore, put off the works of darkness, and let us put on the weapons of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us walk properly as in the day; not in orgies and instances of drunkenness, not in episodes of illicit sexual intercourse and acts of licentiousness, not in discord and jealousy; <sup>14</sup>but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not make provision for the lusts of the flesh.**

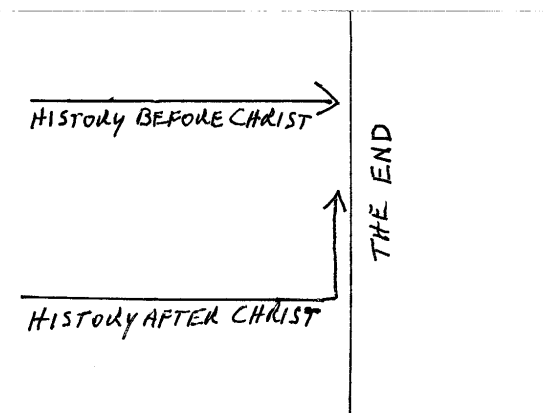
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<sup>207</sup> Quoted in Kruse (2012), 501.

1. Now is no time to be lax, to be sleeping, in our discipleship because we are closer to the end (whenever that may be) than when we first believed. Each new day gives more reason to be diligent, not less. It is like the children's game "Mr. Pop" when you cannot see the timer. Since you *know* the "pop" is coming, the longer you wait the greater the sense of urgency.

2. Verse 12a ("The night progressed, and the day has drawn near") may be a phrase from a traditional baptismal liturgy where the one entering the faith (when they "first believed") was told that, with Christ's coming and ministry, the day of salvation had been brought "near."<sup>208</sup> In other words, it is not a statement that the consummation had "drawn near" while the Roman Christians had been waiting but that it had drawn near in the work of Christ. The former would imply the consummation was "near" in comparison to how long they had been waiting; the latter means only that it was "near" in a theological or eschatological sense.

a. The "day of salvation," meaning the consummated kingdom, was brought near with the ministry of Christ in that the last event in God's plan to secure the consummation had taken place. Since Christ's achievement, creation and history have been on the verge of the end, poised for the consummation, however long it should take to occur. This poorly drawn diagram represents the idea. As long as this reality, history as we know it, continues, it does so on the brink of Christ's return and the consummation of all things. However long God in his purposes extends the time since Christ, Christ's coming is ever at our door.



b. As Stott puts it:

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<sup>208</sup> Moo (2018), 836 (fn. 408), notes that many think 13:11-14 reproduces, at least in part, early Christian baptismal liturgy. Peter Stuhlmacher states in *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, trans. by Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 212, "[I]n this section [13:11-14] Paul is taking up in part hymnically formulated elements of the baptismal liturgy (cf. Eph. 5:14) and traditional motifs from early Christian speeches of exhortation which were delivered to the baptized members of the church of Christ." Harrison and Hagner (2008), 202, likewise acknowledge, "There may be elements of baptismal liturgy underlying this passage." As noted by Jewett (2007), 817, Heinrich Schlier suggested that 13:11-12 reflect a baptismal hymn being quoted.

[W]hat the apostles did know is that the kingdom of God came with Jesus, that the decisive salvation events which established it (his death, resurrection, exaltation and gift of the Spirit) had already taken place, and that God had nothing on his calendar before the parousia. It would be the next and the culminating event. So they were, and we are, living in 'the last days.' It is in this sense that Christ is coming 'soon' (16:20). We must be watchful and alert, because we do not know the time.<sup>209</sup>

3. Since the consummation is closer now than at any time in the past, we need, more than ever, to live in light of that day. There is no place for such things as sexual immorality, drunkenness, strife, and jealousy. Rather, we are to become more like Jesus and make no provision for the lusts of the flesh.

## *VI. A Plea for Peace Among Jew and Gentile Christians (14:1-15:13)*

### *Background*

Recall that the church in Rome at this time included both Jews and Gentiles, but the Gentiles appear to have been in a majority that was large enough that Paul included the church within the sphere of those Gentiles to whom his apostleship was especially directed (1:5-6, 13; 15:15-16). This demographic probably was influenced by Emperor Claudius's expulsion of the Jews, which would include Jewish Christians, from Rome in A.D. 49.<sup>210</sup>

The OT prohibited Israelites from eating certain kinds of meat (Leviticus 11, 20:25; Deut. 14:3-21) and any meat not slaughtered in such a way as to drain the blood (Lev. 17:10-16, 19:26; Deut. 12:15-25), while only Nazirites and priests on duty were required to abstain from wine (Num. 6:2-4; Judg. 13:4-5; Amos 2:11-12; Lev. 10:9). Scrupulous Jews sometimes would avoid all meat when they were in an environment where they could not be sure of the *kind* of meat it was or how it had been *prepared or used* beforehand.<sup>211</sup> And it may have been quite difficult to obtain kosher meat in Rome at this particular time, especially if, as some scholars suggest, the Romans shut down the Jewish slaughterhouses when they expelled the Jews in A.D. 49. The scarcity of kosher food would have been magnified if non-Christian Jews acquired the little kosher meat that was available and refused to share it with Jewish Christians.

Even wine sometimes was avoided out of fear it may have been tainted by idolatry. Augustine commented, "But some weaker ones abstained from meat and wine, so as to avoid unknowingly eating foods which had been sacrificed to idols. At that time the Gentiles sold all sacrificed meat in the butcher shops, poured out the first fruits of the wine as a libation to their idols

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<sup>209</sup> Stott (1994), 352.

<sup>210</sup> See, e.g., Carson and Moo (2005), 393-398.

<sup>211</sup> Moo (2018), 846-847; Dunn (1988), 801.

and even made some offerings in the wine presses."<sup>212</sup> But the conflict in Rome seems centered on food (14:2-3, 6, 15, 20, 23) and holy days (14:5-6). It is possible, as Cranfield observes, that drinking is mentioned in v. 17 simply because it is a natural concomitant of eating and wine is mentioned in v. 21 as an extension of the principle enunciated with regard to the disagreement about food.<sup>213</sup>

These dietary rules and observance of holy days, especially the Sabbath, were considered very important matters of Jewish faithfulness. They were central to maintaining the unique and separate status of the Jewish people. When Jews became Christians, it was difficult for them to accept in their hearts that it was fine to eat the things they had long been taught were offensive to God and to accept that the prescribed holy days were not distinctively sacred.<sup>214</sup>

This attachment to the Mosaic law shows up in many places in the NT. Some Jews insisted that people must submit to the Mosaic law, in all its particulars, to be saved in Christ (e.g., Acts 15:1, 5). These are, of course, the Judaizers whom Paul so fiercely opposed in Galatians and elsewhere. Others, like those in Rome, continued to practice ritual aspects of Judaism as a matter of personal conscience, without making it a test of salvation (if they were Judaizers Paul would not have pleaded for them to be understood and accepted). Even among this group, however, there was a tendency to think that those not following the law were less faithful or less devoted to God, to hold them somewhat at a distance. Conversely, there was a tendency among those not following the law to look down on the law keepers as unenlightened and arrogant.

This is how most modern commentators understand the root issue in Rom. 14:1-15:13.<sup>215</sup> Kruse, citing James Dunn, N. T. Wright, Douglas Moo, and Joseph Fitzmyer, states: "The most widely accepted view, and that adopted in this commentary, is that the 'weak' are Jewish Christians (including possibly proselytes) who practiced essentially Jewish customs, and the 'strong' were mainly Gentile Christians (including some Jewish believers who were liberated like Paul himself) who felt no obligation to practice these customs."<sup>216</sup>

Romans 14:1-15:13 is a plea for peace among the Jewish and Gentile Christians. There may have been some Gentiles among the law keepers (converts to Judaism) and some Jews among those who recognized their freedom from the law, but for the most part the divide was between Jews and Gentiles.

#### A. The strong and weak must receive one another (14:1-12)

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<sup>212</sup> Quoted in Kruse (2012), 512.

<sup>213</sup> Cranfield (1979), 2:718 (fn. 1), 725.

<sup>214</sup> Dunn (1988), 800-801.

<sup>215</sup> Moo (2018), 845 (fn. 471).

<sup>216</sup> Kruse (2012), 510.

**But welcome the one who is weak in faith, [though] not for quarrels about opinions. <sup>2</sup>One person has the faith to eat everything, but the one who is weak eats [only] vegetables. <sup>3</sup>Let the one who eats not despise the one who does not eat, and let the one who does not eat not judge the one who eats, for God welcomed him. <sup>4</sup>Who are you who judge another's house slave? To his own lord he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. <sup>5</sup>[For] one person judges [one] day in preference to [another] day, but another person judges every day [alike]; let each be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup>The one who esteems the day, esteems [it] to the Lord; and the one who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who abstains from eating, abstains to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup>For none of us lives for himself, and none dies for himself; <sup>8</sup>for whether we live, we live for the Lord; and whether we die, we die for the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup>For to this end, Christ died and lived [again], so that he might exercise lordship over both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup>But you, why do you judge your brother? or you too, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, <sup>11</sup>for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will acknowledge God." <sup>12</sup>So [then], each of us will give account of himself [to God].**

1. In v. 1 Paul tells the Gentile majority that they are to welcome or receive the one who is "weak in faith," meaning the Jewish Christian who is weak in his grasp of the implications of the faith, who has underdeveloped convictions about what the faith allows.

a. These weak Christians are not merely to be tolerated but are to be accepted into the fellowship of the family of God. They are not to be mocked or disparaged for their convictions, as that would make them feel like outsiders.

b. Moreover, they are to be accepted with the right motivation and spirit. They are not to be received provisionally for the purpose of quarreling with them over their misguided convictions. That does not mean that teaching them is forbidden; it means that they are not to be received with the ulterior motive of setting them straight, not to be given a kind of probationary reception.

2. He says in vv. 2-4 that those whose faith is strong enough to eat meat are not to have a disdainful, condescending attitude toward the law-observing Jewish minority, but neither is the Jewish minority to judge those who eat meat, for God has welcomed them. Since God accepts the meat eaters, then so must the Jewish Christians. After all, it is the Lord's judgment of his servant that matters, and the meat eater will stand in the Lord's approval, as meat eating is not wrong for the Christian.

3. As I have said, Jewish and Gentile Christians differed in the observance of holy days and in the eating of meat. In vv. 5-6 Paul notes that the scrupulous Jew considered certain days, especially the Sabbath, as a distinctively holy day, whereas the Gentile believer considered all

days equal in holiness. The scrupulous Jew also considered it wrong (or at least inferior or less pious) to eat meat or drink wine that may be ritually unclean. Paul says that either practice is acceptable as long as it is done with a clear conscience, as long as each is fully convinced in his own mind that the conduct is acceptable to God.

a. It is crucial to note that the practices of both the strong and the weak are acceptable to God because *neither is sinful*. The one who observes holy days and abstains from meat and wine because he erroneously, but sincerely, believes it is God's will to do so is doing more than the Lord requires by restricting his freedom. The one who correctly understands that the food laws and sacred days of the Mosaic law are not binding on the Christian is enjoying his freedom in the Lord. These things are like circumcision: it is not sinful to do them or to abstain from doing them.

b. When something is sinful, however, it does not become acceptable just because the one doing it believes it is not sinful. One's ignorance does not baptize sin. You may recall that some in Corinth justified eating sacrificial food at the cultic meals in pagan temples; they were convinced it was fine. Indeed, they pressed for the right to do so in the name of knowledge, but Paul would have none of it (see esp. 1 Cor. 8:1-13 with 10:14-22). It is only when something is a matter of indifference to God that one's conscience is the controlling guide. In the case of morally neutral matters, if you feel it is wrong, then for *you* it *is* wrong.

c. Of course, the scrupulous Jew believes at some level that this is a matter of God's will; that is why his conscience is disturbed by it. In this case, however, we know the scrupulous Jew is wrong because Paul tells us so *implicitly* by the fact he labels the Jews "weak in faith" and leaves the issue as a matter of conscience (v. 5), which he would not do if it were objectively sinful to eat the meat. He also makes the point *explicitly* in vv. 14, 20. The Jewish Christian hears these words but has not yet internalized them so as to be free in his heart from the conditioning of his upbringing. He does not yet have the consent of his conscience to engage in the practice.

#### *Excursus on "Holy Days"*

Paul's indication that the observance of "holy days" is a matter of indifference to God raises several issues. Is Paul denying that Sunday is an appointed day for Christians to gather for corporate worship? I don't think so. After all, Sunday is called "the Lord's Day" in Rev. 1:10, which shows that it is distinct from other days.<sup>217</sup> In 1 Cor. 16:1-2 we see that Paul told both the Galatian churches and the Corinthians to set aside a sum of money for the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the first day of each week, which most scholars recognize shows that "Sunday is

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<sup>217</sup> Richard Bauckham states in "The Lord's Day" in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 231: "We conclude that in the Didache, Ignatius, and the Gospel of Peter Κυριακή is a technical term in fairly widespread use at least in Syria and Asia Minor, designating the first day of the week as the Christian day of regular corporate worship. It therefore becomes extremely likely that κυριακή ἡμέρα in Revelation 1:10 also means Sunday."

already the day of meeting."<sup>218</sup> And we see in Acts 20:7 that the saints gathered together on the first day of the week specifically to take the Lord's Supper ("to break bread"). The fact Paul was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (Acts 19:21, 20:16) and yet waited in Troas seven days until the church gathering on Sunday, and then left the next morning, indicates that Sunday was already fixed as the day of the assembly. Gordon Fee comments, "[Luke's account] implies most strongly that Paul and the others waited in Troas until the 'first day of the week' precisely because that is when the Christians gathered for the breaking of bread, that is, their meal in honor of the Lord."<sup>219</sup>

What Paul is saying is that, under the new covenant, the Jewish practice of considering certain days as distinctively *holy* is a matter of indifference to God. No day is *holier* than another to those in Christ; rather, all days are equally holy. So Christians are not obligated to observe the Sabbath or other Jewish holy days. The same truth is indicated in Gal. 4:9-10 and Col. 2:16-17. That means that those who seek to bind Sabbath observance on Christians are wrong, and if they are making it a test of salvation, as the Judaizers did, they are in serious trouble.

That the "Lord's Day" is an appointed day of Christian worship does not mean it is a more sacred day, a distinctively holy day, in the sense the Sabbath was a more sacred day. I realize that some believe Sunday is a Christianized version of the Jewish Sabbath, but I think that is incorrect. As Andrew Lincoln explains:

[T]he Lord's Day need not be understood in terms of a sacred day. . . . The day can be said to be the Lord's because it is the appropriate day for worshipping Him, and this is significantly different from the view that sees the day, by analogy with the Jewish Sabbath, as a full twenty-four hour period belonging to the Lord in a distinct way from that in which all the Christian's time belongs to the Lord. Whereas the latter is in conflict with the sentiment approved in Rom. 14:5, the former need by no means be. There is a sense in which all of life should be a prayer, and yet a recognition of this does not detract from the need for specific prayer at specific times. Similarly the notion that all of one's time is devoted to the Lord does not detract from the necessity of specific worship at specific times. To claim that specifically Sunday is the appropriate day for a gathering of the Christian community for worship is not to imply that somehow in itself that day is holy.<sup>220</sup>

Is Paul saying that Christians are free to make up their own holy days and observe them? I do not think so. The holy days he was speaking about had been prescribed by God in the OT. It is one thing for the Jew who had been trained in the law all his life to feel that observing those days was an honor to God; it is another thing to feel that days never appointed or sanctioned by God can

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<sup>218</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 296.

<sup>219</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 900.

<sup>220</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 389-390.

be observed in honor to him.<sup>221</sup> We are not in the same position as those Jews whose consciences were caught in the salvation-historical shift wrought by Christ.

What about Jewish converts today? Would their observance of holy days (and food laws) still be a matter of indifference to God? It may be that more is expected in light of the completed revelation, and I would certainly try to teach them, but maybe they could have the same hyperactive conscience as the Jews of Paul's day. In any event, they must be careful not to bind their weak conscience on other believers, and they must not adopt other elements of the law that are inherently contrary to the gospel, such as offering animal sacrifices for sin.

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4. Paul says in vv. 7-9 that the Christian must follow his conscience because he or she lives to please the Lord, not his fellow believers. We are the Lord's from start to finish, and every aspect of our lives, even our death, is lived under his lordship. Christ's lordship is so total that it includes both the dead and the living.

5. In vv. 10-12 he explains that refusing to accept one another because of disputes over matters of indifference to God is absurd in light of the fact we will each answer to God not only for our practices but also for our refusal to receive one another.

#### B. Do not cause your brother to stumble (14:13-23)

**<sup>13</sup>Let us, therefore, no longer judge one another, but judge this instead: not to place a stumbling block for a brother or a pitfall. (<sup>14</sup>I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, except to the one who considers something to be unclean; to that one, it is unclean.) <sup>15</sup>For if your brother is grieved on account of [your] food, you no longer are walking in accordance with love. Do not by your food destroy that one for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup>Therefore, do not let your good be blasphemed. <sup>17</sup>For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup>For the one who in this serves Christ as a slave is pleasing to God and approved by people. <sup>19</sup>So then, let us pursue the things of peace and the things of edification for one another. <sup>20</sup>Do not for the sake of food demolish the work of God. All things are indeed clean, but it is evil for the person who eats with stumbling [to eat]. <sup>21</sup>It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine or [anything] by which your brother stumbles. <sup>22</sup>The faith which you have, keep to yourself before God. Blessed is the man who does not bring judgment on himself by**

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<sup>221</sup> As God's working "behind the scenes" is implied throughout the Book of Esther, the reader is likewise to infer his working in the establishment of the Feast of Purim in Esther 9. This is supported by the fact its establishment is reported positively by God in the inspired text with no hint of disapproval. This is in stark contrast to the criticism of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12:33 for, among other things, establishing a feast "in the month that he had devised from his own heart."

**what he approves, <sup>23</sup>but the man who doubts stands condemned if he eats, because it is not from faith; and everything that is not from faith is sin.**

1. In v. 13 Paul tells the Jewish and Gentile Christians that rather than judge each other, they ought to decide (or judge) not to place before their brother or sister a "stumbling block" or a spiritual trap ("pitfall"). In other words, we are not to do something that will lead to the spiritual downfall of our brother or sister. It becomes clear in the following verses that Paul is speaking specifically of the differences between Jewish and Gentile Christians regarding the old covenant food laws.

2. Verse 14 is somewhat parenthetical in that it gives the basis on which one's behavior can be a stumbling block and an obstacle, can lead to another's spiritual harm. The fact of the matter is that no food is "unclean," meaning defiling as defined by the Mosaic law. Those aspects of the law have no continuing validity. Indeed, the Lord himself taught this, as Mark points out in Mk. 7:19b. *But that is not the end of the story.*

3. The Jewish Christians, whom Paul labels weak in faith, have not been able to fully internalize this truth. Their consciences have been so firmly trained regarding the Mosaic food laws that many of them cannot escape the sense it is wrong to eat meat or drink wine that may be ritually unclean. Because of that personal conviction, they would be sinning if they consumed this kind of food or drink. If you believe God forbids you to do something, doing it dishonors God because it says you value that thing more than you value pleasing God (see v. 23 – the man who doubts stands condemned if he eats).

4. In vv. 15-16 Paul explains v. 13b (decide not to place a stumbling block for a brother) in light of v. 14 (violating one's conscience is sinful). He says to the Gentile majority that certain ways of exercising their right to eat meat and drink wine may lead their Jewish brother or sister into sin by pressuring them to act contrary to their (albeit hyperactive) conscience. And that would not be consistent with the cardinal Christian virtue of love.

5. Paul goes further in v. 15b and commands them not to exercise their freedom to eat in such a way that it will "destroy" their weaker Jewish brethren for whom Christ died. They are not to let their good liberty be reviled (v. 16), which is what would happen if they exercised it without regard for the tender consciences of their brethren.

Cranfield comments:

The *gar* [for] connects the sentence, not with v. 14 . . . but with v. 13b. The weak in faith will be grievously hurt, he will have the integrity of his faith (i.e., faith in its deepest sense of *fides qua*) and obedience destroyed, and his salvation put at risk, if he is led by his strong fellow-Christian's insistence on exercising the liberty, which he (the strong Christian) truly has, into doing something for which he as yet does not possess the inward liberty. The strong will therefore not be acting in accordance with

Christian love, if his weak brother is thus seriously hurt on account of the food which he (the strong Christian) eats.<sup>222</sup>

Moo likewise states:

Verse 14, supplying the theoretical basis for Paul's use of the language of spiritual downfall in v. 13, is somewhat parenthetical. Verse 15, accordingly, probably relates back especially to v. 13: Don't put a stumbling block in the way of a brother (v. 13b), . . . "for" this is just what you are doing – by insisting on exercising your freedom to eat food, you bring pain to your fellow believer and thereby violate the cardinal Christian virtue of love. The "pain" that the "strong" believer causes the "weak" believer is more than the annoyance or irritation that the "weak" believer might feel toward those who act in ways they do not approve. Its relationship to the warnings about spiritual downfall in vv. 13b and 15b show that it must denote the pain caused the "weak" believer by the violation of his or her conscience.<sup>223</sup>

6. He explains in vv. 17-18 that the kingdom of God in which we participate is not essentially a matter of eating and drinking but a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy that are produced by the Holy Spirit. Here I think Paul is referring to moral living, support of and harmony with fellow Christians, and joy in the life and fellowship with which God has blessed us. The one who serves Christ with these priorities on straight, as he is urging them to do, is pleasing to God and, rather than being blasphemed by the weak, is esteemed by them and respected in the larger society for having a generous spirit and respecting the rights of those with whom one disagrees.

7. In v. 19 he exhorts them to pursue peace and mutual edification. As Cranfield explains, "What is required is an altogether earnest seeking to promote among brethren such a true peace (based on the fundamental peace with God which God Himself has established in Christ) as must manifest itself in mutual upbuilding."<sup>224</sup> This applies to all, but the strong especially needed to hear it because of their insensitive treatment of the weak.

8. In vv. 20-22a Paul rephrases the same points he made in vv. 13-15. The believer should not eat meat, drink wine, or do anything else when to do so will harm his brother or sister by pushing them to act ahead of their conscience. The strong should not exercise their convictions in their weak brothers' faces, thereby placing a stumbling block in their path, but should abstain in those situations. That is what it means in v. 22 to keep the convictions (faith) you have to yourself before God. Since Paul clearly stated that all food is clean, he obviously is not forbidding all teaching of the weak. He is, however, restricting the strong's exercise of liberty until the weak among them genuinely have been enlightened.

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<sup>222</sup> Cranfield (1979), 2:714-715.

<sup>223</sup> Moo (2018), 870.

<sup>224</sup> Cranfield (1979), 2:721.

9. In v. 22b-23 Paul says blessed is the strong believer whose conscience does not condemn him when he exercises his liberty, but the weak believer who eats with doubts about its propriety is sinning and is therefore under God's condemnation. As the anonymous author (dubbed Ambrosiaster by Erasmus) of a fourth-century commentary on Romans put it, "It is true that if someone thinks it is wrong to eat but does so anyway, he is condemned. For he makes himself guilty when he does what he thinks he ought not to do. If someone acts against his better judgment in a matter of conscience, then Paul says that is a sin."<sup>225</sup>

### C. The example of Christ (15:1-6)

**Now we, the strong, ought to bear the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Let each of us please [his] neighbor in what is good for the purpose of edification. <sup>3</sup>For even the Christ did not please himself, but just as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you fell on me." <sup>4</sup>For as much as was written beforehand was written for our instruction, in order that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might hold hope securely. <sup>5</sup>And may the God of endurance and encouragement give you a like mind among yourselves in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that unanimously with one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. Rather than the strong pleasing themselves by insisting on the unfettered exercise of their liberty, they ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, meaning they ought to ease the burden of the weak by accepting them and doing what love requires toward them.

2. Each of the strong should please his weak "neighbor" (fellow believer) for the neighbor's spiritual benefit, which results in the growth and solidarity (edification) of the community of faith. For even the Christ did not please himself but went to the cross where he bore for others the ultimate insults against God. As Cranfield remarks on v. 3:

The purpose of the quotation [of Ps. 69:9] is to indicate the lengths to which Christ went in His not pleasing Himself. If He, for men's sakes, was willing to bear, as one element of his sufferings, the concentration of all men's hatred of God, of all their futile, inanely contemptuous, insolence against God, how absurdly ungrateful should we be, if we could not bring ourselves to renounce our self-gratification in so unimportant a matter as the exercising of our freedom with regard to what we eat or whether we observe special days – for the sake of our brothers for whom He suffered so much!<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Kruse (2012), 526.

<sup>226</sup> Cranfield (1979), 2:733.

3. Having quoted Ps. 69:9, Paul in v. 4 reminds them that the Scriptures were written for their instruction, so that with endurance and by means of the encouragement provided by the Scriptures, they might remain steadfast in their hope. Though written in the past, it is God's word for us today.

4. Verses 5-6 contain a prayer of intercession that Paul offers to God and records for the benefit of the Roman Christians. It serves as an indirect way of exhorting them. His prayer is that they may have a "like mind" among themselves, meaning that, despite their differences over food laws and holy days, they might remain united in their devotion to the Lord and to serving him in the world. Only when such unity exists are we able to glorify God in the way he deserves to be glorified. Division over matters of indifference diverts the church from its purpose.

#### D. Final appeal (15:7-13)

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore, welcome one another, just as also Christ welcomed you for the glory of God. <sup>8</sup>For I say Christ has become a servant of the circumcision for the sake of God's truth, in order to confirm the promises to the fathers, <sup>9</sup>and the Gentiles glorify God for [his] mercy, just as it is written, "On account of this I will acknowledge you among the Gentiles and sing praise to your name." <sup>10</sup>And again it says, "Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people." <sup>11</sup>And again, "Praise the Lord, all the Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him." <sup>12</sup>And again Isaiah says, "He will be the shoot of Jesse, the one who arises to rule the Gentiles; on him the Gentiles will hope." <sup>13</sup>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

1. In v. 7 Paul urges the saints to accept one another as fellow members of a family because they have been received by Christ and therefore *are* fellow members of a family, the family of God. This kind of acceptance and unity redounds to the glory of God.

2. In vv. 8-12 he says they also are to receive one another because Christ has acted to bring God's blessings to both Jews and Gentiles in fulfillment of Scripture. Christ became a servant of the Jew (e.g., Mat. 15:24 – he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel) in order to show that God is faithful, which he did by fulfilling the promise of blessing that God had made to the Jewish patriarchs. He also became a servant of the Jew in order that the Gentile might glorify God for the sake of his mercy through their subsequently being grafted into the people of Israel. In vv. 9b-12 Paul quotes various Scriptures to show that the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the praise of God has always been part of God's purpose.

3. In v. 13 Paul rounds off his exhortation to the weak and strong with another prayer report. He prays that, despite their differences, they will be filled with joy and peace in their believing, because it is only in this kind of community that the hope produced by the Spirit abounds.

The more joy and unity there is in our fellowship, the more the Spirit generates a genuine expectation of eternal glory. Moo summarizes 15:7-13 this way: "Both strong and weak Christians should receive each other as full and respected members of the Christian community, for God himself has shown, in fulfillment of Scripture, that he accepts both Jews and Gentiles as his people."<sup>227</sup>

### *Some Application Issues*

1. Romans 14:1-15:13 makes clear that it is God's will for a Christian to abstain from optional conduct when engaging in it may encourage a Christian who is not convinced the conduct is acceptable to God to engage in it contrary to his conscience. It would be unloving to exercise one's liberty in such a brother's presence because that would put undue pressure on him to act ahead of his conscience, to engage in that conduct before he was convinced internally that it was acceptable to do so, which would be sinful for him. Pushing a brother to sin by violating his conscience is a grave wrong because it not only is deeply distressing – the cause of the brother's grieving (14:15a) – but can begin a hardening process that leads to spiritual ruin (14:15b – "destroy"). That is why Paul generalizes the principle in 14:21. Love will neither grieve nor endanger another for the sake of a personal preference (Rom. 13:10).
2. Paul says the same thing in relation to the consciences of certain Gentiles in 1 Cor. 8:7-13. He says there that even if the arguments of some in the congregation that it was acceptable to eat cultic meals in pagan temples were correct, which they were not (as he makes clear in 10:14-22), the principle of brotherly love still would require that they forego the practice so as not to push their brothers who were former idolaters into violating their "weak" consciences (there meaning idol-sensitive consciences) by participating in the meal.
3. A complicating factor in applying Paul's teaching today is that we have no apostle or inspired interpreter to answer definitively whether the matters of personal conduct over which we dispute are in fact matters of indifference to God. Whereas Paul, speaking by the Spirit, specified that consuming ritually contaminated meat and wine was a morally neutral matter, we continue to disagree over whether certain conduct, such as dancing, playing cards, or consuming alcohol in any amount, is prohibited.
4. The good news is that this complicating factor, this lack of certainty about the sinfulness of certain conduct, does not affect the duty the strong owe the weak regarding that conduct. The position of the strong, those with the wider conscience, is that the conduct is indeed a matter of indifference to God – otherwise they would not be engaging in it – so they agree it is a Romans 14-15 situation. One simply needs to apply to them what Paul taught the strong in our text. So here I want to consider applying Paul's teaching about the strong's duty toward the weak.

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<sup>227</sup> Moo (2018), 849.

5. In a culture that glorifies freedom and majority rule, Paul's teaching on the strong's obligation to the weak meets much resistance.

a. Those with wider consciences often cannot bear restricting their freedom for the sake of those they believe are in error, especially when those thought to be in error are a minority. There is this misguided notion that liberty is negated by any condition on its exercise and that practices of the majority should not be circumscribed by a minority. Unfortunately, that notion sometimes trumps the biblical injunction to love, and Paul's admonitions are rationalized away in the process.

b. We fear the truth that we are to restrict our liberty out of love for Christians with narrower consciences because we fear it will lead inevitably to a church that is captive in everything to the narrowest conscience in the group. Even if that were the case, which I am convinced it is not, it is no justification for avoiding what Paul taught. Paul delivered the word of the Lord not only to the Romans and Corinthians but also to us.

6. I do not have all the answers, but in applying Paul's teaching I think it helps to keep a number of things in mind. I offer them for consideration, as I think they can be helpful.

a. First, Paul is speaking about matters of *conscience*, not matters of *preference*.

(1) For his teaching to apply, the conduct in question must be something the other person feels at some level is *wrong* for him to do. It does not apply to disagreements over matters of preference, no matter how strong those preferences may be. Not liking something is different from believing that it is a matter of God's will.<sup>228</sup>

(2) One may prefer topical preaching over expository preaching; discussion Bible classes over lecture classes; taking the Lord's Supper before the sermon over taking it after; one kind of worship song over another kind of song; more worship songs over fewer worship songs, and on and on. You may have good reasons for your preferences, but however good they are the situation is outside the scope of Paul's teaching. He is dealing with what is believed, at least at some level, to be wrong, something that violates one's conscience to engage in.

(3) It is appropriate and necessary to explore whether an alleged matter of conscience is in fact a matter of preference that is being mistaken for a matter of conscience. If the conscience of the one objecting is hyperactive, teaching can help him see that and thus lead him to be at peace with the practice in question. If, on the other hand, the leaders become convinced that the objector is correct and the practice is contrary to God's will, they will eliminate the practice.

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<sup>228</sup> It is possible, however, that a practice that one grew up convinced was a matter of God's will but now understands *intellectually* is a human tradition can have a lingering effect on one's conscience. I think some of the Jewish Christians in Rome were in this position.

b. Second, Paul is speaking about *conduct*, not teaching, that is done *in the presence of* the brother or sister with the narrower conscience.

(1) That is why in Rom. 14:22a he tells those with a broader conscience to keep the convictions they have to themselves before God and why in 1 Cor. 8:10 he speaks of the one who *sees you* eating in the temple. The strong are free to enjoy the liberty they have in Christ when they are away from brothers with a narrower conscience. Indeed, Paul in 14:22b labels as "blessed" the man who can enjoy his liberty with a clear conscience.

(2) The restriction is limited to conduct done in the other person's presence, presumably because doing something in someone's presence increases the pressure on that person to engage in it before he or she is truly ready. It is a different social and psychological dynamic. Paul was quite willing to *teach* the Jewish Christians they were wrong in thinking they needed to abstain from meat and wine, which would influence them toward consuming it, but he forbid eating and drinking in their faces. So if, for example, one's brother cannot play cards with a clear conscience, one is free to tell him he is wrong and to play cards outside of his presence, but one may not invite him over and play cards in his face.

c. Third, Paul is speaking here and in 1 Corinthians of *personal* conduct, something the brother with a narrower conscience can be induced to imitate, like eating meat, drinking wine, or participating in temple feasts.

(1) When conduct that a brother with a narrower conscience can imitate (like eating meat, drinking wine, eating cultic meals in pagan temples) is done in that brother's presence the social dynamic creates unacceptable pressure on him to engage in the conduct, to copy it, before he is fully convinced it is acceptable to do so. Paul says that love will not subject a brother to *that risk* of sinning, will not risk pushing him *in this way* to act contrary to his conscience. Teaching him that his belief is incorrect also pressures him to engage in the practice, but that is acceptable because it is a different kind of pressure than modeling the behavior in his presence.

(2) But some disagreements about sin are over things that are not matters of personal conduct, not behavior that a brother can be induced to imitate. Some things are thought by some to be wrong only for the church, the local *community* of believers, to do.

(a) A person may believe, for example, that it is sinful for a congregation to incorporate or to have a kitchen. He has no problem with individual Christians incorporating or having kitchens; he just thinks it is wrong for *the church*, the collective entity, to do so.

(b) Now, this brother is free to make his case to the elders about the sinfulness of church kitchens, and if he succeeds in convincing them then they are obligated as servants of Christ to remove (or not include) the kitchen. But the question is whether, *having failed to convince them* that church kitchens are sinful, the brother can fairly appeal to Paul's

teaching to claim that the elders *still* are biblically obligated to refrain from having a kitchen in the building to protect his narrower conscience.

(c) I see those situations as being outside the scope of Paul's teaching in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8 because an individual cannot act as a community, as a congregation, and thus the Christian with the narrower conscience cannot be induced to imitate the behavior he thinks is wrong so as to violate his conscience. It is like someone who believes it is wrong (constitutionally speaking) for a public school to endorse a religion but not wrong for individuals to do so. If his public school endorsed Christianity, he would think the school had done wrong, but he would not thereby be induced to imitate the behavior he thinks is wrong because he cannot act as a public school. He can only act as an individual.

(d) A person's conscience may be bothered less directly by being a member of a congregation he feels is doing wrong, but God does not seem to require abstention from conduct that may disturb another's conscience merely by his or her congregational affiliation. You never see the inspired writers or Jesus in the letters to the churches in Revelation bolstering their ethical admonitions to a church by saying that, in addition to being wrong, the uncorrected conduct may disturb the consciences of others through their congregational affiliation and therefore they need to comply for the additional reason of love for their brothers and sisters. Rather, the effect of one's behavior on the conscience of other Christians is given as a basis for restricting that behavior only where the behavior is done in the presence of one with a narrower conscience so as to risk inducing its imitation. This seems to be where God has struck the balance between the eldership's duty and ability to direct the affairs of the congregation in accordance with its best judgment and its duty to protect the weak.

d. Fourth, Paul is speaking of optional conduct (assumed to be so in 1 Corinthians 8 for purpose of argument) the foregoing of which does not leave one with only a substantially more burdensome way of obeying a divine command.

(1) I would put the dispute over one cup versus multiple communion cups in this category. Unlike abstaining from meat and wine (or pagan temple feasts in 1 Corinthians 8) for the sake of a brother's narrower conscience, abstaining from multiple cups leaves only the one-cup option for obeying the command to participate in the Lord's Supper, which for many is a significant hindrance to taking the Supper or to doing so with the required mindset.

(2) Some people simply cannot overcome the sense of disgust and concern over disease in drinking after scores or hundreds of people. Granted that their gut-level aversion to doing so is not a matter of conscience – they do not believe it is sinful to use one cup – it nevertheless is a reality that significantly hinders their obedience. For them, using multiple cups is not a mere preference; rather, the alternative of one cup is a genuine emotional or psychological barrier to their obedience.

(3) Since Paul's directive in Romans to abstain from meat and wine (and from temple feasts in Corinth) carried no such spiritual cost, did not leave the abstainer with only a

substantially more burdensome way of obeying a command, the one-cup dispute is outside the scope of Paul's teaching. Therefore, the proponent of using one cup cannot rightly claim that Paul's teaching on abstention mandates that the elders shift to one cup for the sake of his conscience. The burden that practice places on others' obedience is a distinguishing factor of which the elders must take account.<sup>229</sup>

(4) Note that those who resist deferring to the brother with a narrower conscience regarding the number of communion cups do not appeal for protection to Paul's teaching in Romans or 1 Corinthians. Rather, they claim that putting a substantial burden on others' observance of the Supper (the countervailing spiritual cost) removes the one-cuppers from the scope of Paul's teaching in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8, and thus the elders are not biblically obligated to defer to the one-cupper's narrower conscience in the matter.

7. So has Paul's instruction died a death of a thousand qualifications? Is there nothing left that applies today?

a. His teaching regarding the strong's duty to the weak applies to a host of disagreements – playing cards, drinking alcohol, dancing, celebrating holidays, etc. – but the one that is perhaps most pressing today is the case of instrumental music in worship. Many people, me included, are convinced it is sinful to worship God with instrumental accompaniment. I explain why I think that in "[Beyond the Argument from Silence: A Covenantal View of A Cappella Worship](#)" and "[A Primer on Christian Worship](#)." Yet, some elderships in our brotherhood are switching their congregations to instrumental worship. These leaders insist on engaging in the purely optional conduct of worshipping God with instruments in a community of saints that includes some who deny or are not fully satisfied that doing so is acceptable to God.

b. These Christians certainly are being *pressured* to worship God contrary to their consciences through conduct that is done in their faces, which Paul makes clear love will not do. But it is worse than that. They are having their consciences *actually violated* because corporate worship is a *communal activity*. It is something offered to God as a whole by a united body of believers not the separate offerings of individuals who happen to be in proximity to one another. It is congregational not individual, corporate not singular. It is *our* worship. This is not a matter of mere congregational identification; it is a matter of communal offering. If half the congregation burns incense or blows whistles, those not engaging in that specific conduct share in it in a way they would not if that same conduct was done personally or privately.<sup>230</sup>

c. That's why worship is always such a sensitive issue. As Howard Norton wisely observed decades ago:

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<sup>229</sup> The proponent of using one cup may grant the inapplicability of Paul's teaching on abstention and still argue that the nature of love obligates a fellow believer to burden his own obedience rather than push the one-cupper to violate his conscience. But that alleged requirement of love is not specified in Scripture.

<sup>230</sup> This is true for the one-cupper in a multi-cup assembly, but again, that situation is distinguishable because abstaining from the use of multiple cups leaves one with only the one-cup alternative, which for some is a substantial burden on their obedience to the command.

The public worship assembly is critical to our unity as a brotherhood. It always has been. Because of this we must be exceedingly careful when we tamper with it in any way. We are very resilient in churches of Christ when the issues on which we disagree fall outside the public assembly of the saints. When controversial practices enter the public assembly, however, everyone is affected; and the possibility for division and shattering is scary.<sup>231</sup>

d. One technique used to justify riding roughshod over the more restrictive consciences of brothers and sisters in the matter of instrumental worship is to pit the duty not to harm them against the duty to evangelize. It first is asserted that love for the lost requires Christians to change any optional behavior in order to maximize the attractiveness of the gospel (often citing 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Instrumentalists then leap from that assertion to the claim that the principle of abstention set forth in Rom. 14:1-15:13 does not apply in cases where the narrow conscience of the weak is thought to be limiting the attractiveness of the gospel. In other words, if instrumental music is thought to make the worship assembly more appealing to the lost, it is deemed acceptable to introduce it regardless of whether it defiles the consciences of brothers and sisters. That strikes me as misguided for several reasons.

(1) First, in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul made clear that, even if the Corinthians were correct in arguing that attending temple feasts was a morally neutral matter (he makes clear in 1 Cor. 10:14-22 that they were not correct) love for weaker brothers still would require them to forego the practice. It did not matter that temple feasts would have been an ideal place for making and building ties with non-Christians in the community for purposes of evangelism. That potential outreach benefit, its evangelistic utility, did not trump the obligation of love for the weaker brothers and sisters.

(2) Second, few things are more devastating to the church's witness than dissension and a lack of love for its own. The maligning of the name of Christ that results from failing to respect the tender consciences of brothers and sisters (Rom. 14:16, 18) more than offsets the attraction of any superficial lure. As Grant Osborne writes:

Above all, believers must live on the basis of love by respecting the honest convictions of other Christians and honoring those convictions when in the presence of such "weak" brothers and sisters in Christ. This certainly has been proven true in our own day as well. Many non-Christians say, "Why should I be a Christian? You don't get along with each other, so why should I think becoming a Christian will bring peace or happiness?"<sup>232</sup>

(3) Moreover, edification or upbuilding of the saints is a crucial concern of the worship assembly. Everything in that assembly is to be done with their upbuilding in mind

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<sup>231</sup> Howard Norton, *Christian Chronicle*, Jan. 1993, C-16.

<sup>232</sup> Osborne (2004), 369.

(1 Cor. 14:26). There is no way to square that concern with defiling the consciences of brothers and sisters. That is the opposite of building them up (Rom. 14:19, 15:2); it is tearing them down.

(a) Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 9:19-23 suggest nothing to the contrary. He there was speaking of using or foregoing his freedom from Jewish food laws so as not *needlessly* to alienate Gentile or Jewish non-Christians, respectively. He certainly was not suggesting that a Christian should, out of concern over alienating non-Christians, conduct himself in a worship assembly in a way that defiles another believer's conscience. Any alienation of non-Christians that results from honoring the conscience of one's brothers and sisters is anything but needless.

(b) Is it not clear what Paul would say to a Gentile Christian in Rome who insisted on eating meat at a church fellowship meal because doing so would attract non-Christians? After all, he wrote in 1 Cor. 8:13, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will *never eat meat forevermore*, so that I not cause my brother to stumble." That is about as emphatic as it gets. Paul says much the same in Rom. 14:21.

e. Some think they can outflank the problem by splitting congregational worship into instrumental and noninstrumental services.

(1) But valuing an admittedly optional practice over the church's unity in worship, forcing a divide in that fundamental aspect of the church's being for the sake of a personal preference, is to misjudge the extent to which God's pleasure in our praise is tied to the peace and unity of the Spirit, to the one voice with which it is offered. What human father would be pleased if some of his children insisted on holding his birthday party in their preferred garden spot knowing that his other children could not attend because of allergies? The intended expression of love for the father would be ruined by the division and lack of brotherly love that it reflected. It would be the antithesis of Psalm 133: *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!*<sup>2</sup> *It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!*<sup>3</sup> *It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.*

(2) Moreover, splitting the congregation's worship by insisting on an optional practice that excludes others broadcasts to the very community they desire to reach how little they love and value each other. As I already noted, that devastates the church's witness. Church splits are a black eye, and I would say all the more so when they are forced over personal preferences rather than convictions of conscience.

(3) And finally, I submit that splitting the church this way is contrary to the edification and upbuilding that is central to the worship assembly. The division and the lack of love that produced the separation would haunt each assembly and be a constant source of discouragement. Each segregated gathering would proclaim that personal preference is more important than Christ's desire for love and unity and thus would be a tacit repudiation of the truth that Jesus is Lord. If maintaining socioeconomic divisions *within* an assembly caused Paul to

declare that the Corinthians' gatherings did more harm than good (1 Cor. 11:17), would he not say the same about assemblies that are split for the sake of one group's musical preference?

8. Before getting back to the text, I should mention what I see as a more general qualification of Paul's teaching. I think there is a difference in what love owes a congregational member whose conscience is put at risk by a *change in practice* and what it owes one who *joins* the congregation knowing that the existing practices are unacceptable to his conscience. Love will not impose a conscience-pressuring or conscience-violating practice on another, but one who joins a congregation knowing that the existing practices are unacceptable to his conscience is *voluntarily exposing oneself* to the practice for the purpose of changing it, for the purpose of setting the others straight. So one who, for example, joins an instrumental congregation believing instrumental worship is wrong is in a different position from one who is a member of an *a cappella* congregation that goes instrumental.

9. Finally, I want to add a footnote about Paul's use of the term "weak" in Romans 14. Those who believe it is wrong to worship God with instrumental music, for example, are *similar* to the "weak ones" in Rome in that the convictions of both are relatively restrictive. That is why both need those with broader consciences to limit their liberty. They are *dissimilar*, however, in that only the "weak ones" in Rome were *for certain* misguided. There is a longstanding, unresolved dispute about the propriety of instrumental music in worship. So to the extent the label "weak ones" connotes that one's view is erroneous in addition to being relatively narrow, applying it to those opposed to instrumental music and other worship innovations is misleading and I think needlessly alienating.

## VII. The Letter Closing (15:14 - 16:27)

### A. Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)

#### 1. God's chosen minister to the Gentiles (15:14-21)

**<sup>14</sup>Now my brothers, I am convinced about you, I myself, that you yourselves are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. <sup>15</sup>But I have written to you rather boldly in part, as one who reminds you, because of the grace that was given to me from God <sup>16</sup>that I might be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving the gospel of God as a priest, in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, I have [this] boasting in Christ Jesus with reference to what concerns God. <sup>18</sup>For I will not dare to say anything except what Christ accomplished through me for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, <sup>19</sup>by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the**

**Spirit [of God], so that from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum I have completed [the preaching of] the gospel of Christ,<sup>20</sup> but in this way, by striving eagerly to preach the gospel where Christ was not named, so that I not build on another's foundation.<sup>21</sup> Rather, just as it is written, "Those to whom it was not announced concerning him shall see, and those who have not heard will understand."**

a. In vv. 14-16 Paul assures these Christians in Rome, whom he has never visited, that he did not intend by his letter to call into question their spiritual maturity. Rather, he wrote them as he did because God has made him a minister of Christ to the Gentiles. He serves the gospel as a (metaphorical) priest whose role is to present the Gentiles to God as an acceptable offering, meaning as people who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

b. He says in v. 17 that, because he has been called by God in this way ("Therefore"), he can legitimately boast in Christ about that ministry. It is not a boasting about his own achievements but a boasting in what Christ has accomplished through him.

c. In vv. 18-19a he says that the success of his ministry is due to divine enablement. Christ is the active worker; Paul is simply the instrument. Gentiles were brought to obedience by both "word and deed," which includes miracles (signs and wonders), and all of which was accomplished through the power of the Spirit.

d. The result of this divinely driven ministry was that, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (a coastal province northwest of Macedonia, right across the Adriatic Sea from Italy), Paul had planted strategic churches in all these regions (v. 19b). As John Knox puts it:

He could say that he had completed the preaching of the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum only because this statement would have meant for him that the message had been proclaimed and the church planted in each of the nations north and west across Asia Minor and the Greek peninsula – "proclaimed" widely enough and "planted" firmly enough to assure that the name of Christ would soon be heard throughout its borders.<sup>233</sup>

e. Paul explains in v. 20 that the manner in which this was done was by striving eagerly to preach the gospel where there was no worship of Christ at all. In other words, Paul saw his particular mission as planting strategic churches in virgin gospel territory. Of course, in fulfilling this pioneer-church planting ministry, Paul often engaged in other ministry activities and worked with churches that he did not plant (e.g. Antioch).

f. Paul in v. 21 cites Isa. 52:15b for the point that his church-planting ministry among Gentiles is fulfilling the OT prediction about Gentiles coming to see and understand the message about the Servant of the Lord.

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<sup>233</sup> Quoted in Moo (2018), 912–913.

## 2. Plans to visit Rome (15:22-29)

**<sup>22</sup>For this reason, I was also frequently hindered from coming to you. <sup>23</sup>But now, no longer having a place in these regions and having had a longing to come to you for enough years, [I plan to] <sup>24</sup>when I go to Spain, for I hope to see you when passing through and by you to be helped on my way there, if first I may for a time be filled full of you. <sup>25</sup>But now, I am going to Jerusalem to render a service to the saints. <sup>26</sup>For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to do some sharing for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup>For they were pleased, and they are their debtors; for if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual things, they are also obligated to minister to them in fleshly things. <sup>28</sup>Therefore, after completing this and having sealed this fruit to them, I will go by way of you to Spain. <sup>29</sup>And I know that when coming to you, I will come in the fullness of Christ's blessing.**

a. Paul explains in vv. 22-24 that the demands of his ministry in planting churches from Jerusalem to Illyricum had often prevented him from coming to Rome. But having planted churches in those regions, he hopes to visit Rome on his way to planting the church in Spain.

b. He says in vv. 25-27 that first he is going to Jerusalem to deliver the collection taken from the Gentile mission churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem (v. 25). Those Gentiles were not *legally* obligated to send this money, as in the case of the Jewish temple tax, but they were indebted to the Jewish Christians as the people through whom they received the blessings of Christ. The salvation of the Gentiles comes only by way of the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel (1:16, 4:13-16, 11:17-24, 15:7-9).

c. In vv. 28-29 he says that after delivering the collection and "having sealed this fruit to them," he plans to head to Spain by way of Rome. "Sealing" is often an official affirmation of authenticity, so "sealing" the collection (fruit) perhaps refers to Paul's vouching for the contents, both in terms of amount and purpose. With that mission accomplished, Paul knows that his visit to Rome will be with the full blessings of Christ. In other words, he would not have gone prematurely.

d. We do not know if Paul ever got to Spain. The NT never reports such a visit; and the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles suggests that Paul turned back to the east after his trip to Rome. But part of 1 Clement, a letter from Clement of Rome to the Corinthians dating around A.D. 95, can be interpreted to suggest that he did reach Spain.

### 3. Request for prayer (15:30-33)

**<sup>30</sup>Now I urge you, [brothers], through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to struggle with me in prayers to God on my behalf, <sup>31</sup>so that I may be rescued from the disobedient in Judea and my service to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, <sup>32</sup>so that coming to you in joy through the will of God, I might find rest with you. <sup>33</sup>May the God of peace be with you all, amen.**

a. Paul in vv. 30-31 urges the Christians in Rome to struggle with him in prayers on his behalf that he might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. And as we know from Acts 21:27-36, the Romans took him in custody to keep the Jews from killing him.

b. Paul also wants them to pray that the collection will be accepted by the church in Jerusalem. This collection and its reception were loaded with theological overtones. The contribution showed the Gentiles' appreciation of Jewish primacy in the gospel, and the acceptance showed the Jews' acceptance of these churches in the one community of faith. There were conservative Jewish-Christian groups that continued to be hostile toward Paul, and he was concerned that the gift might be rebuffed.

c. If this happens, he might come to them in joy, if it is God's will that he come, and be refreshed by them (v. 32). Verse 33 expresses Paul's desire for God's blessing on their community.

### B. Greetings (16:1-23)

#### 1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)

**Now I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is [also] a servant of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup>that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and may assist her in whatever matter she has need of you, for she herself has also been a benefactor of many, myself included.**

a. Paul commends to the Roman Christians a sister in Christ named Phoebe. She may well have been the person who carried Paul's letter to the Romans. She is described as a "*diakonos*" of the church in Cenchrea, which has fueled debate about whether the early church had women "deacons" in the sense of servants who were formally appointed by the church.

(1) The word means "servant" and is used in that general sense many times in the NT. Indeed, it was translated "servant" in Rom. 16:1 in the Geneva Bible (1560), which was followed by the King James Bible (1611) and all subsequent English versions until the RSV

(1946), which introduced "deaconess." Modern English translations have continued to favor "servant" by a significant margin (NAS, NKJV, NIV'84, GNT [serves] NASU, NET, HCSB, CEB, LEB, ESV, and CSB). One must look beyond the word itself to determine whether Paul uses it here as a description or as a title.

(2) Historically, apart from an equally ambiguous reference in Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan (about A.D. 110), there is no mention of female deacons until the third century. That, coupled with the emphasis on male leadership in the church and what I consider the most likely interpretation of 1 Tim. 3:11 ("wives" of deacons), leads me to favor the general term "servant." For more on this, see Ashby Camp, "[Women Are Not to Be Appointed to the Office of Deacon.](#)"

b. But granting that Phoebe was not a "deacon" in the formal appointed sense, this woman was obviously an important member of the church in Cenchrea and highly esteemed by Paul. He asks the Romans to receive her in a manner worthy of the Lord and to help her in whatever way she needs help. He describes her as a "benefactor" or "patron" of many, including himself. According to Moo:

A "patron" was one who came to the aid of others, especially foreigners, by providing housing and financial aid and by representing their interests before local authorities. Cenchreae's status as a busy seaport would make it imperative that a Christian in its church take up this ministry on behalf of visiting Christians. Phoebe, then, was probably a woman of high social standing and some wealth, who put her status, resources, and time at the services of traveling Christians, like Paul, who needed help and support. Paul now urges the Romans to reciprocate.<sup>234</sup>

## 2. Greetings to Roman Christians (16:3-16)

**<sup>3</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup>who risked their own neck on behalf of my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles, <sup>5</sup>and [greet] the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epenetus, who is the firstfruits of Asia for Christ. <sup>6</sup>Greet Mary, who labored much for you. <sup>7</sup>Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are well known to the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup>Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. <sup>10</sup>Greet Apelles, one approved in Christ. Greet those from the [household] of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup>Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those from the [household] of Narcissus who are in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis who labored much in the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Greet Rufus, the elect in**

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<sup>234</sup> Moo (2018), 932.

**the Lord, and the mother of him and of me. <sup>14</sup>Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them. <sup>15</sup>Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. <sup>16</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.**

a. Moo notes that "there was a tendency in the ancient world to give certain names to certain kinds of people." He says these studies show that a majority of the names are Gentile and that the majority of the names are those of slaves and "freedmen," or the descendants of slaves/freedmen.<sup>235</sup>

b. Paul refers to at least three house churches (vv. 5, 14, 15) in this greeting. Though it is doubtful that early Christians met "almost exclusively" in homes, as has often been asserted,<sup>236</sup> meeting in homes was certainly part of the Christian landscape.

c. Regarding the name "Prisca" in v. 3, the NET note states: "In the NT 'Priscilla' and 'Prisca' are the same person. The author of Acts uses the full name Priscilla, while Paul uses the diminutive form *Prisca*." Paul notes that at some point they had risked their necks to save him, probably meaning that they had risked the Roman penalty of beheading. We do not know when this occurred.

d. Verse 16:7 has received much attention in recent discussions about women's role in the church, with some claiming that it establishes that Junia, a female, was an authoritative apostle. That is not the case.

(1) The first problem with this claim is the possibility that the second name is the masculine name "Junias" (a contracted form of Junianus) instead of the feminine name "Junia." ERV, ASV, RSV, NAS, NEB, NJB, and NASU have the masculine Junias. HCSB, NRSV, REB, NET, and ESV have the feminine Junia but provide Junias as an alternative in a footnote. Michael Harding concludes his 2016 examination of the issue this way: "The probability that Ἰουνίαν is feminine appears more likely. Nevertheless, since neither side can prove its case with certainty, 'to use Junias, who may be male or female, as an example of a 'woman preacher' or 'woman elder' would be unreasonable.'"<sup>237</sup> A 2020 analysis by Esther Yue L. Ng makes the identification even more uncertain.<sup>238</sup>

(2) The second problem with the claim is that it is doubtful the phrase *episēmoi en tois apostolois* means "well known *among* the apostles" rather than "well known *to* the apostles," which is how I have translated it, in accord with HCSB, NET, ESV,

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<sup>235</sup> Moo (2018), 934-935.

<sup>236</sup> See, Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* rev. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

<sup>237</sup> Michael W. Harding, "Female Apostleship in Romans 16:7," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 21 (2016), 71.

<sup>238</sup> Esther Yue L. Ng, "Was Junia(s) in Rom. 16:7 a Female Apostle? And So What?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63:3 (Sept. 2020), 517-533.

LEB, CSB, LSB, and the footnote in the NIV.<sup>239</sup> The work of Daniel Wallace and Michael Burer,<sup>240</sup> and Burer's further defense and new evidence,<sup>241</sup> argue strongly for the latter, known as the "non-inclusive interpretation." David Huttar has highlighted the weakness of the main arguments for the "inclusive interpretation," showing how lexical-grammatical and contextual considerations as well as interpretive history make that view less likely than modern scholarship has allowed. He concludes:

In fact, it may now be possible to say that the probability has shifted in favor of the non-inclusive interpretation. The lexical-grammatical evidence makes it possible, the evidence from the context is inconclusive, and the historical evidence makes the non-inclusive interpretation more probable than heretofore commonly acknowledged.<sup>242</sup>

Harding notes that a valid case can be made for the exclusive interpretation and then states:

The Scriptures are completely silent about these "most distinguished apostles" other than this brief mention (Rom 16:7) in the middle of a long list of names. The only external information in the Scriptures available to properly interpret ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις regards the gender of the twelve apostles of Christ, the replacement of Judas with Matthias, the appointment of missionary apostles, the references to church apostles who acted as emissaries and envoys, the biblical requirements for leadership in the church, and the biblical restrictions on female ministry. Those subjects would require a lengthy treatment by themselves; yet, they all point in the opposite direction of an inclusive interpretation.<sup>243</sup>

(3) And finally, if Andronicus and Junia(s) are in fact referred to as "apostles," it would be in a nontechnical sense that they were traveling missionaries. The word "apostle" is used elsewhere in the NT in a nontechnical way (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), and it is used of traveling missionaries in the Apostolic Fathers (Did. 11.3-6; Herm. *Vis.* 13.1; *Sim.* 92.4; 93.5; 102.2). Schreiner remarks, "One should scarcely conclude from the reference to Junia and the other

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<sup>239</sup> NET note states: "The term ἐπίσημος (*episēmos*) is used either in an implied comparative sense ("prominent, outstanding") or in an elative sense ("famous, well known"). The key to determining the meaning of the term in any given passage is both the general context and the specific collocation of this word with its adjuncts."

<sup>240</sup> Daniel Wallace and Mike Burer, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16.7," *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76-91.

<sup>241</sup> Michael Burer, "ΕΠΙΣΗΜΟΙ ἘΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΙΣ In Rom 16:7 As 'Well Known To The Apostles': Further Defense And New Evidence," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:4 (Dec. 2015), 731-755.

<sup>242</sup> David Huttar, "Did Paul Call Andronicus An Apostle in Romans 16:7?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:4 (Dec. 2009), 778.

<sup>243</sup> Harding (2016), 79.

women coworkers names here that women exercised authority over men contrary to the Pauline admonitions in 1 Tim. 2:12."<sup>244</sup>

e. It is noteworthy that Paul mentions nine women in this list, five of whom are commended for their labor in the Lord. Though women cannot assume the same roles as men in the church, they were active and important members in the community of faith.

f. I do not understand the command in v. 16 that they "Greet one another with a holy kiss" as a command to kiss. As Moo says, "The kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world generally and in Judaism especially."<sup>245</sup> Paul *assumes* they'll greet by kissing but commands that it be a "*holy* kiss." He is saying, "The kiss with which you greet one another is to be holy," meaning a kiss that is a genuine expression of Christian love. The greeting is not to be duplicitous, as was the kiss that betrayed our Lord. If a commander wrote to his troops: "Greet President Trump with a respectful salute," his point would not be that they are to salute – that is a given – but that *when* they salute, they do so with the respect that is due the office of President.

### 3. A warning, a promise, and a prayer (16:17-20)

**<sup>17</sup>Now I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who create dissensions and causes for offense contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. <sup>18</sup>For such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own belly, and through smooth speech and well-chosen words deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. <sup>19</sup>For [the report of] your obedience has reached all people. Therefore, I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise toward the good and innocent toward the evil. <sup>20</sup>And the God of peace will swiftly crush the Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.**

a. In vv. 17-18 Paul warns them to watch out for those who create division in the church and threaten the spiritual lives of the members by teaching what is contrary to what they had been taught. He seems to have a certain group in mind, perhaps the Judaizers who plagued him throughout his ministry. They are to avoid or turn away from these false teachers because they are not serving the Lord and because they are able to deceive the unsuspecting by their smooth talk.

b. He notes in v.19 that the existence of the church in Rome was well known, and with that kind of profile it is only a matter of time before the wolves arrive ("For"). Paul, of course, rejoices over them, but he wants them to be "innocent" in terms of evil but "wise," meaning not naive, in terms of false teaching. As Bruce puts it, they should not be "so 'simple-minded' that as to swallow whatever is offered."<sup>246</sup> It is the idea behind Jesus' saying about being "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mat. 10:16).

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<sup>244</sup> Schreiner (1998), 797.

<sup>245</sup> Moo (2018), 942.

<sup>246</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, TNTC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 264.

c. As they practice that discernment, God will give them swift victory over the Satan-inspired heretics who arrive to trouble them (v. 20a). And Paul adds a prayer for the grace of the Lord Jesus to be with them.

#### **4. Greetings from Paul's companions (16:21-23)**

**<sup>21</sup>Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, and [so do] Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. <sup>22</sup>I, Tertius, who wrote the epistle, greet you in the Lord. <sup>23</sup>Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and [so does] Quartus, the brother.**

a. Paul's companions here include their greetings to the Roman brothers and sisters. Jason is probably the person from Thessalonica mentioned in Acts 17:5-7, 9, and Sosipater is probably the Berean named Sopater in Acts 20:4.

b. Tertius is the secretary who actually wrote the letter under Paul's direction. Gaius is probably the same person mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:14 as one Paul baptized. Erastus is described here as the city's "treasurer," and this is probably the same Erastus mentioned in an inscription from Corinth. Nothing else is known of Quartus.

#### **5. Concluding doxology (16:25-27)**

**<sup>25</sup>Now to him who is able to establish you, in accordance with my gospel, that is, the preaching of Jesus Christ, in accordance with the revelation of the mystery; having been kept silent through times eternal <sup>26</sup>but now having been displayed and through the prophetic scriptures, in accordance with the command of the eternal God, having been made known for [bringing about] the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles; <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to him be glory forever, amen.**

Paul ends the letter with a doxology in praise of the God who has in the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed the climax of salvation history. Schreiner comments:

Paul prays that God will receive the glory for the gospel that has now been revealed. This gospel was both hidden and prophesied in the OT, but the age of fulfillment has come so that the mystery that was shrouded in the past and prophesied is now publicly declared and being fulfilled. The gospel centers on Jesus the Messiah, for he fulfills the saving promises of the OT, and these promises are being realized in the inclusion of all nations into the people of God. As the Gentiles exercise the obedience that comes from faith, they show that they are the children of Abraham.

God's saving plan, which includes Jews and Gentiles and is effected through Jesus the Messiah, is wisely constructed so that he receives that glory and praise forever.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Schreiner (1998), 810.