

Notes on Romans

2000 Edition
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Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Throughout the history of the church, from postapostolic times to the present, Christians have regarded Romans as having been one of the Apostle Paul's epistles.¹ Not only does the letter claim that he wrote it (1:1), but it develops many of the same ideas and uses the same terminology that appear in Paul's earlier writings (e.g., Gal. 2; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 8—9).



Following his conversion on the Damascus Road (34 A.D.), Paul preached in Damascus, spent some time in Arabia, and then returned to Damascus. Next he travelled to Jerusalem where he met briefly with Peter and James. He then moved on to Tarsus,

¹See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1:1-2.

which was evidently his base of operations and from which he ministered for about six years (37-43 A.D.). In response to an invitation from Barnabas he moved to Antioch of Syria where he served for about five years (43-48 A.D.). He and Barnabas then set out on their so-called first missionary journey into Asia Minor (48-49 A.D.). Returning to Antioch Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians to strengthen the churches that he and Barnabas had just planted in Asia Minor (49 A.D.). After the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Paul took Silas and began his second missionary journey (50-52 A.D.) through Asia Minor and on westward into the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. From Corinth, Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians (51 A.D.). He proceeded to Ephesus by ship and then on to Syrian Antioch. From there he set out on his third missionary journey (53-57 A.D.). Passing through Asia Minor he arrived in Ephesus where he labored for three years (53-56 A.D.). During this time he wrote 1 Corinthians (56 A.D.). Finally Paul left Ephesus and travelled by land to Macedonia where he wrote 2 Corinthians (56 A.D.). He continued south and spent the winter of 56-57 A.D. in Corinth. There he wrote the Epistle to the Romans and sent it by Phoebe (16:1-2) to the Roman church.

The apostle then proceeded from Corinth by land clockwise around the Aegean Sea back to Troas in Asia where he boarded a ship and eventually reached Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the Jews arrested Paul and imprisoned him (57 A.D.). He arrived in Rome as a prisoner and ministered there for two years (60-62 A.D.). During this time he wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). The Romans freed Paul, and he returned to the Aegean area. There he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, experienced arrest again, suffered imprisonment in Rome a second time, wrote 2 Timothy, and died as a martyr under Nero in A.D. 68.²

We know very little about the founding of the church in Rome. According to Ambrosiaster, a church father who lived in the fourth century, an apostle did not found it (thus discrediting the Roman Catholic claim that Peter founded the church). A group of Jewish Christians did.³ It is possible that these Jews became believers in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) or at some other time quite early in the church's history. By the time Paul wrote Romans the church in Rome was famous throughout the Roman Empire for its faith (1:18).

PURPOSE

Paul wrote this epistle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for several reasons.⁴ He wanted to prepare the way for his intended visit to the church (15:22-24). He evidently hoped that Rome would become a base of operations and support for his pioneer missionary work in Spain and the western portions of the empire that he had not yet

²See the appendix "Sequence of Paul's Activities" at the end of these notes for more details.

³William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. xxv.

⁴See Philip R. Williams, "Paul's Purpose in Writing Romans," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:509 (January-March 1971):62-67; Walter B. Russell, III, "An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:578 (April-June 1985):174-84; and Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 16-22.

evangelized. His full exposition of the gospel in this letter would have provided a solid foundation for their participation in this mission.

As Paul looked forward to returning to Jerusalem between his departure from Corinth and his arrival in Rome, he was aware of the danger he faced (15:31). He may have written the exhaustive exposition of the gospel that we have in Romans to set forth his teaching in case he did not reach Rome. From Rome his doctrine could then go out to the rest of the empire as others preached it. Paul may have viewed Romans as his legacy to the church, his last will and testament.

Another reason for writing Romans was undoubtedly Paul's desire to minister to the spiritual needs of the Christians in Rome even though they were in good spiritual condition (15:14-16). The common problems of all the early churches were dangers to the Roman church as well. These difficulties included internal conflicts, mainly between Jewish and Gentile believers, and external threats from false teachers. Paul gave both of these potential problems attention in this epistle (15:1-8; 16:17-20).

Paul also wrote Romans as he did because he was at a transition point in his ministry, as he mentioned at the end of chapter 15. His ministry in the Aegean region was solid enough that he planned to leave it and move farther west into new virgin missionary territory. Before he did that, he planned to visit Jerusalem where he realized he would be in danger. Probably therefore Paul wrote Romans as he did to leave a full exposition of the gospel in good hands if his ministry ended prematurely in Jerusalem.

"The peculiar position of the apostle at the time of writing, as he reviews the past and anticipates the future, enables us to understand the absence of controversy in this epistle, the conciliatory attitude, and the didactic and apologetic elements which are all found combined herein."⁵

The great contribution of this letter to the body of New Testament inspired revelation is its reasoned explanation of how God's righteousness can become man's possession.

The Book of Romans is distinctive among Paul's inspired writings in several respects. It was one of the few letters he wrote to churches with which he had had no personal dealings. The only other epistle of this kind was Colossians. It is also a formal treatise within a personal letter.⁶ Paul expounded on the gospel in this treatise. He probably did so in this epistle rather than in another because the church in Rome was at the heart of the Roman Empire. As such it was able to exert great influence in the dissemination of the gospel. For these two reasons Romans is more formal and less personal than most of Paul's other epistles.

⁵W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 20.

⁶For a discussion of the literary genre of Romans, see Robert E. Longacre and Wilber B. Wallis, "Soteriology and Eschatology in Romans," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998):367-82.

The Epistle to the Romans is, by popular consent, the greatest of Paul's writings. William Tyndale, the great English reformer and translator, referred to Romans as "the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament." He went on to say the following in his prologue to Romans that he wrote in the 1534 edition of his English New Testament.

"No man verily can read it too oft or study it too well; for the more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is chewed the pleasanter it is, and the more groundly [sic] it is searched the preciouser [sic] things are found in it, so great treasures of spiritual things lieth hid therein."⁷

Martin Luther wrote the following commendation of this epistle.

"[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."⁸

MESSAGE⁹

Throughout the history of the church Christians have recognized this epistle as the most important book in the New Testament. The reason for this conviction is that it is an exposition of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luther called Romans "the chief part of the New Testament and the perfect gospel." Coleridge, the English poet, declared it to be "the most profound work in existence." Frederick Godet, the French commentator, described it as "the cathedral of the Christian faith."¹⁰

To appreciate the message of this book it will be helpful first to consider Paul's presuppositions. He based these, of course, on Old Testament revelation concerning cosmology and history.

First, Paul assumed the God of the Old Testament. He assumed God's existence and full deity. He believed that God is holy and just. He also held that God is the creator, sustainer, and sovereign ruler of the universe.

Second, Paul's view of man is that he is subject to God's government of the universe. Man has received a measure of freedom from God, so he can choose to pursue sin. However, if he does so, he is still in the sovereign hand of God. God can allow the consequences of his sins to have their effects on him both now and forever. Man is also in authority over the rest of the material creation (Gen. 1:28). What man has experienced, the material creation also has experienced and reflects as a result of man's action.

⁷Quoted by F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, p. 9.

⁸Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle to the Romans" (1522), cited by Moo, p. 22.

⁹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:92-109.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 2:1:93.

Third, Paul's view of history was that of Old Testament revelation. The important historical events for Paul were those in his Scriptures.

Adam was the first man. He rebelled against God's authority. The result was threefold: the practical dethronement of God in the minds of Adam's descendents, the degradation of humanity, and the defilement of creation. This is a very different view of history from what evolutionists and humanists take. Man has lost his scepter because he rebelled against God's scepter.

Two other individuals were specially significant in history for Paul as we see in Romans: Abraham and Jesus Christ. God called Abraham to be a channel of blessing to the world. Christ is the greatest blessing. Through Him people and creation can experience restoration to God's original intention for them.

These are Paul's basic presuppositions on which all his reasoning in Romans rests. Romans is not the best book to put in the hands of an unsaved person to lead him or her to salvation. John is better for that purpose. However, Romans is the best book to put in the hands of a saved person to lead him or her to understand and appreciate our salvation.

We turn now to the major revelations in this book. These are its central teachings, the emphases that distinguish Romans from other books of the Bible.

First, Romans reveals the tragic helplessness of the human race. No other book of the Bible looks so fearlessly into the abysmal degradation that has resulted from human sin. If you read only 1:18—3:20, you will become depressed by its pessimism. If you keep reading, you will conclude from 3:21 on that we have the best, most optimistic news you have ever heard. This book is all about ruin and redemption. Its first great revelation is the absolute ruin and helplessness of the human race.

Paul divides the ruined race into two parts. The first of these is the Gentiles who have the light of nature. God has given everyone, Gentiles and Jews, the opportunity of observing and concluding two things about Himself: His wisdom and power. The average person as well as the scientist concludes that Someone wise must have put the natural world together, and He must be very powerful. Nevertheless having come to that conclusion he turns from God to vain reasonings, vile passions, unrighteous behavior, envy, murder, strife, deceit, insolence, pride, and perverted conduct. Just read today's newspaper and you will find confirmation of Paul's analysis of the human race.

The other part of the ruined race is the Jews who, in addition to the light of nature, also had the light of Scripture. Paul observed that in spite of his greater revelation and privilege the Jew behaves the same way as the Gentile. Yet he is a worse sinner. Having professed devotion to God and having claimed to be a teacher of the Gentiles because of his greater light he disobeys God and causes the Gentiles to blaspheme His name. Paul concluded, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

The second major revelation of Romans is the magnificence of the divine plan of salvation. This plan centers on Jesus Christ whom Paul introduced on the very first page of his letter (1:3-4). God declared to everyone that the Jesus of the Gospels is His Son by resurrecting Him.

Two words describe Christ's relation to the divine plan of salvation: manifestation and propitiation. The righteousness manifested in Him is available to people through His propitiation. God's righteousness is available to everyone because Jesus died as the perfect offering for sin. The righteousness we see in Jesus in the Gospel records is available to those who believe that His sacrifice satisfied God (3:21, 25).

We can also describe God's relation to the plan of salvation with two words: holiness and love. The plan of salvation that Romans expounds resulted from a holy God reaching out to sinful humanity lovingly (3:22, 24). This plan vindicates the holiness of God as it unveils God's gracious love (chs. 9—11).

Man's relation to the plan of salvation is threefold. It involves justification, the imputation of God's righteousness to the believing sinner. It also involves sanctification, the impartation of God's righteousness to the redeemed sinner. Third, it involves glorification, the perfection of God's righteousness in the sanctified sinner. In justification God lifts the sinner into a relationship with Himself that is more intimate than we would have enjoyed if we had never sinned. In sanctification God progressively transforms the sinner into the Savior's image by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In glorification God finally restores the sinner to the place God intended for us to occupy in creation.

The creation's relation to the plan of salvation is twofold. God restores creation's king, man, to his intended position. Second, creation realizes all of its intended possibilities that sin has denied it.

Let us note next some of the lessons of this book. What did God want us to learn from it?

First, Romans calls us to measure ourselves by divine rather than human standards. We sometimes evaluate ourselves and one another by using the criteria that our age sets or that we set. However to know our true condition we must use the criteria that God sets. This standard reveals that we are all guilty before God. This is one of the great lessons that Romans teaches us.

Second, Romans calls us to live by faith rather than by sight. God did not come any closer to mankind in the incarnation of Christ than He ever had been. Yet in the incarnation the nearness of God became more obvious to people. In the resurrection the Son of God became observable as the Son of God to human beings. All the glories of salvation come to us as we believe God. Romans contrasts the folly of trying to obtain salvation by working for it with trusting God, simply believing what He has revealed as true.

Third, Romans calls us to dedicate ourselves to God rather than living self-centered lives (12:1). This is the reasonable response to having received salvation. We should give ourselves to God. God's grace puts us in His debt. Paul did not say that if we fail to dedicate ourselves to God we are unsaved. Rather he appeals to us as saved people to do for God what He has done for us, namely giving ourselves out of love. When we do this, we show that we truly appreciate what God has done for us.

On the basis of these observations I would summarize the message of Romans in these words. Since God has lovingly provided salvation for helpless sinners through His Son, we should accept that sacrifice by faith and express our gratitude to God by dedicating our lives to Him.

In conclusion let me suggest an application of the message of Romans.

In view of the greatness of the salvation that God has provided as Romans reveals, we, as Paul, have a duty to communicate this good news to the world (1:14-17; Matt. 28:19). We do this both by lip and life, by explanation and by example (8:29). Our living example will reflect death to self as well as life to God (6:13).

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-17
 - A. Salutation 1:1-7
 - 1. The writer 1:1
 - 2. The subject of the epistle 1:2-5
 - 3. The original recipients 1:6-7
 - B. Purpose 1:8-15
 - C. Theme 1:16-17
- II. The need for God's righteousness 1:18—3:20
 - A. The need of all people 1:18-32
 - 1. The reason for human guilt 1:18
 - 2. The ungodliness of mankind 1:19-27
 - 3. The wickedness of mankind 1:28-32
 - B. The need of good people 2:1—3:8
 - 1. God's principles of judgment 2:1-16
 - 2. The guilt of the Jews 2:17-29
 - 3. Answers to objections 3:1-8
 - C. The guilt of all humanity 3:9-20
- III. The imputation of God's righteousness 3:21—5:21
 - A. The description of justification 3:21-26
 - B. The defense of justification by faith alone 3:27-31
 - C. The proof of justification by faith from the law ch. 4
 - 1. Abraham's justification by faith 4:1-5
 - 2. David's testimony to justification by faith 4:6-8
 - 3. The priority of faith to circumcision 4:9-12
 - 4. The priority of faith to the promise concerning headship of many nations 4:13-17
 - 5. The exemplary value of Abraham's faith 4:18-22
 - 6. Conclusions from Abraham's example 4:23-25
 - D. The benefits of justification 5:1-11
 - E. The universal applicability of justification 5:12-21

- IV. The impartation of God's righteousness chs. 6—8
 - A. The believer's relationship to sin ch. 6
 - 1. Freedom from sin 6:1-14
 - 2. Slavery to righteousness 6:15-23
 - B. The believer's relationship to the law ch. 7
 - 1. The law's authority 7:1-6
 - 2. The law's activity 7:7-12
 - 3. The law's inability 7:13-25
 - C. The believer's relationship to God ch. 8
 - 1. Our deliverance from the flesh by the power of the Spirit 8:1-11
 - 2. Our new relationship to God 8:12-17
 - 3. Our present sufferings and future glory 8:18-25
 - 4. Our place in God's sovereign plan 8:26-30
 - 5. Our eternal security 8:31-39
- V. The vindication of God's righteousness chs. 9—11
 - A. Israel's past election ch. 9
 - 1. God's blessings on Israel 9:1-5
 - 2. God's election of Israel 9:6-13
 - 3. God's freedom to elect 9:14-18
 - 4. God's mercy toward Israel 9:19-29
 - 5. God's mercy toward the Gentiles 9:30-33
 - B. Israel's present rejection ch. 10
 - 1. The reason God has set Israel aside 10:1-7
 - 2. The remedy for rejection 10:8-15
 - 3. The continuing unbelief of Israel 10:16-21
 - C. Israel's future salvation ch. 11
 - 1. Israel's rejection not total 11:1-10
 - 2. Israel's rejection not final 11:11-24
 - 3. Israel's restoration assured 11:25-32
 - 4. Praise for God's wise plans 11:33-36
- VI. The practice of God's righteousness 12:1—15:13

- A. Dedication to God 12:1-2
 - B. Conduct within the church 12:3-21
 - 1. The diversity of gifts 12:3-8
 - 2. The necessity of love 12:9-21
 - C. Conduct within the state ch. 13
 - 1. Conduct towards the government 13:1-7
 - 2. Conduct toward unbelievers 13:8-10
 - 3. Conduct in view of our hope 13:11-14
 - D. Conduct within Christian liberty 14:1—15:13
 - 1. The folly of judging one another 14:1-12
 - 2. The evil of offending one another 14:13-23
 - 3. The importance of pleasing one another 15:1-6
 - 4. the importance of accepting one another 15:7-13
- VII. Conclusion 15:14—16:27
- A. Paul's ministry 15:14-33
 - 1. Past labors 15:14-21
 - 2. Present program 15:22-29
 - 3. Future plans 15:30-33
 - B. Personal matters ch. 16
 - 1. A commendation 16:1-2
 - 2. Various greetings to Christians in Rome 16:3-16
 - 3. A warning 16:17-20
 - 4. Greetings from Paul's companions 16:21-24
 - 5. A doxology 16:25-27

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-17

This great epistle begins with a broad perspective. It looks at the promise of a Savior in the Old Testament, reviews Paul's ministry to date, and surveys the religious history of the Gentile world.

"The main body of Romans is a treatise on Paul's gospel, bracketed by an epistolary opening (1:1-17) and conclusion (15:14—16:27). These opening and concluding statements have many similarities, not the least of which is the emphasis on the *gospel*. (Eight of the 11 occurrences in Romans of *euangelion* ["gospel"] and *euangelizomia* ["to evangelize"] are in these passages.) Paul's special relationship to this gospel, a relationship that encompasses the Roman Christians, both opens and closes the strictly 'epistolary' introductory material in the section (vv. 1-5, 13-15)."¹¹

A. SALUTATION 1:1-7

The salutation, which is the longest salutation in Paul's epistles, identifies the writer (v. 1), introduces the subject of the letter (vv. 2-5), and greets the original readers (vv. 6-7).¹² This first sentence (vv. 1-7) implicitly sets forth the most fundamental facts of Christianity. In particular, it shows that the main facts of the gospel fulfill Old Testament predictions.

1. The writer 1:1

As in all his epistles, Paul used his Roman rather than his Jewish name, Saul, since he was the apostle to the Gentiles. Even though he had not yet visited Rome his readers knew Paul's reputation well. He just needed to give his name to identify himself.

In his relationship to Jesus Christ, Paul was a bond-servant (Greek *doulos*). Some translators have rendered this word "slave," but Paul was a willing servant of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:7). This term is the equivalent of the Old Testament "servant of the Lord" (e.g., Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Nehemiah, and especially David). Paul shared this status with his readers.

The title "apostle" gives Paul's gift and office in the church. He was Jesus Christ's special appointee. This status gave him the right not only to preach the gospel but to found, to supervise, and even to discipline churches if necessary. The basis of his authority, the right to his office, was God's calling (cf. vv. 6, 7).¹³

¹¹Moo, p. 39.

¹²Romans is the longest of Paul's epistles with 7,114 words.

¹³See R. D. Culver, "Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:534 (April-June 1977):131-43.

"Called' means designated and set apart by an action of God to some special sphere and manner of being and of consequent activity."¹⁴

The particular extent of his work, the scope of his calling, was quite narrow, namely to proclaim the gospel (good news) of God. As a Pharisee, Paul had lived a life set apart to observing the Mosaic Law and Jewish customs strictly. Now his calling was to proclaim the gospel (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:12).

2. The subject of the epistle 1:2-5

1:2 Paul next began to exalt the gospel that God had called him to proclaim. It was a message that God had promised, not just prophesied, in the Old Testament Scriptures. The words "his" and "holy" stress the unique origin of the gospel. God had inspired the Old Testament by speaking through men as He gave His revelation. Paul did not preach an unanticipated gospel but one that God had promised through His prophets (cf. 4:13-25; 9:4; 15:8). This is the reason Paul appealed to the Old Testament so fully in this and other of his epistles. Specifically Paul's gospel was not a human invention that tried to make the best of Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ.

1:3-4 Paul identified the gospel's theme to exalt it further. The gospel centers on God's Son, Jesus Christ, who was both human and divine. The phrases "according to the flesh" (v. 3) and "according to the Spirit" (v. 4) probably do not contrast the natures of Christ but His relationships.¹⁵ He belonged to two realms. As to his human earthly connection, His origin was the highest. He was not just an Israelite (9:5) but a son of David (Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32; Acts 13:22-23; 2 Tim. 2:8), which was a messianic qualification (Isa. 11:1).

Concerning the realm above He was higher than the angels (Heb. 1:4), the very Son of God (v. 4). The word "power" probably modifies the Son rather than the declaration. Paul probably meant that God declared Jesus to be His powerful Son rather than God powerfully declared that Jesus was His Son. The point of this passage is the greatness of Jesus, not the wonder of the resurrection.

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You

¹⁴William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 3. Italics removed.

¹⁵James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 24-25.

must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."¹⁶

Jesus was always the Son of God, but the Father declared Him to be the Son by resurrecting Him. Jesus did not change in essence—He always was the Son—but in status or function. God appointed the Son to a new and more powerful position in relation to the world at the Resurrection. He is now not only the Messiah but the Lord of all.¹⁷

To what does "the Spirit of holiness" (v. 4) refer? It may be another way of referring to the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Nevertheless in view of the parallel expression "according to the flesh" (v. 3) and the fact that Paul could have said "Holy Spirit" if that is what he meant, probably Paul was referring to the holy nature of Jesus. Jesus' nature was so holy that death could not hold Him.¹⁹

1:5 Paul probably meant that he had received the special grace (gift) of being an apostle. He introduced the character and scope of what follows in this epistle by linking his apostleship with the resurrected Christ. Jesus' descent from David and His resurrection proved that He was the Messiah and Lord promised in the Old Testament. Therefore the gospel that Paul preached as an apostle could bring all people, not just Jews, to faith in Him. It did not bring them to obey the Law of Moses. Obeying God by trusting in Jesus Christ is "for His [Christ's] name's sake" because it glorifies Him.

Faith is obedience to God because God commands everyone to believe in Christ (cf. John 6:29; Acts 17:30-31). This verse is not teaching that saving faith always results in ongoing obedience to God, though that is normally its effect.²⁰

3. The original recipients 1:6-7

1:6-7 Paul assured his readers that they were part of the intent of the gospel. God had not called them to apostleship as God had called him (v. 1) but to sainthood, saint being a common term for believer in the New Testament.

¹⁶C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 41.

¹⁷See S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Jesus That Paul Preached," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:510 (April-June 1971):120-34.

¹⁸C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 19; F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 80.

¹⁹Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol. 10 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 15; Sanday and Headlam, p. 9; Stifler, p. 25.

²⁰See Robert N. Wilkin, "Obedience to the Faith: Romans 1:5," *Grace in Focus* 10:6 (November-December 1995):2-4.

It refers more to position than condition when used this way, though the implication of holiness is strong.²¹

"God's call is not an invitation but a powerful and effective reaching out to claim individuals for himself."²²

Verse 7 really continues the thought of verse 1, verses 2-6 being somewhat parenthetical. "Grace" and "peace" were common salutations in Greek and Jewish letters respectively in Paul's day. God's grace is both His unmerited favor and His divine enablement. It is the basis for any true human peace. The Hebrew concept of peace (Heb. *shalom*) did not just mean freedom from stress, anxiety, and irritation. It included the fullness of God's blessing. Paul desired a continually deeper and richer experience of spiritual blessing for his readers. The linking of "Jesus Christ" with the "Father" implies the deity of the Son.

The salutation reveals the germ ideas that the writer proceeded to develop later. This feature is also characteristic of Paul's other epistles. So far Paul said he had a message that was in harmony with the Old Testament. It was from the risen Christ, and it was for all people. Furthermore it should lead people to obey God by exercising faith in Him.

B. PURPOSE 1:8-15

Having begun with a formal and unusually long greeting compared to his other epistles, Paul next proceeded to address his readers more personally. He had not met the Christians to whom he wrote so he spent some time getting acquainted and sharing his heart with them.

"One of the first lessons of effective leadership is the importance of setting priorities. Not only must things be done right (management) but the right things must be done (leadership)."²³

1:8-10 Paul felt concern for the welfare of this church. The faith of the Roman church had become well known in the few years since it had come into existence (cf. Eph. 1:15-16; Col. 1:3-4; 1 Thess. 1:3). Typically Paul began by offering commendation to his readers for some praiseworthy trait whenever he could. Here he thanked God for the Romans through Jesus Christ, who had created access to God. He praised the Roman Christians for their obedience to God by trusting in Jesus Christ (cf. v. 5). Failure to

²¹See Robert L. Saucy, "Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12, for discussion of the Christian's essential identity. He concluded that we are primarily saints who sin.

²²Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, p. 63. See also W. W. Klein, "Paul's Use of *Kalein*: A Proposal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984):53-64.

²³Mounce, p. 65; Cranfield, 1:78-79.

trust in Christ is really disobedience to God since God now commands everyone to believe in His Son (cf. Acts 17:30-31).

Paul called God as his witness (v. 9) because what he was about to say might be difficult to believe. He claimed to pray for the Romans unceasingly, namely frequently, but not without stopping. The Greek word translated "unceasingly" (*adialeiptos*) denotes that not much time elapsed between his prayers for them. These saints were constantly in his thoughts and prayers. "In my spirit" (NASB) means "with my whole heart" (NIV).

"We are reminded that the real work of the ministry is prayer. Preaching is more a result of the ministry of prayer than it is a ministry itself. A sermon that does not rise from intense and heart-searching prayer has no chance of bearing real fruit."²⁴

1:11-13 As Paul had prayed often for the Romans, so he had also planned often to visit them. His reason was for fellowship, mutual sharing of things profitable. Paul mentioned his contribution first (v. 11) and theirs last (v. 13), and he stressed reciprocity in between (v. 12). The spiritual gift (v. 11) was probably not one specific gift but anything and everything of spiritual benefit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1).²⁵ We should also probably interpret the fruit he hoped to obtain (v. 13) broadly rather than specifically as the fruit of his evangelism among them or financial support.

1:14-15 Paul's love for Christian fellowship and his obligation to preach the gospel to all people motivated him to visit Rome (cf. vv. 1, 5). Having received the grace of God himself he recognized that this placed him in debt to everyone else. He owed them the opportunity to hear the gospel and to receive God's grace themselves. Every Christian is indebted to every non-Christian because we have and can give what can impart life to those who are dead in sin, namely the gospel.

The terms "Greek" and "Barbarian" (v. 14) divide Gentiles by language and culture. In Paul's day this was a standard way of describing all races and classes within the Gentile world.²⁶ The Greek people spoke of anyone who did not speak the Greek language as a barbarian. The Greek word *barbaros* is onomatopoeic and imitates any rough-sounding unintelligible language.²⁷ The "wise" and "foolish" distinction divides people intellectually (cf. 1 Cor. 1:19, 20, 26, 27). Paul was probably thinking primarily of non-Jews since he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

²⁴Mounce, p. 66.

²⁵In 1 Corinthians 12:1 he mentioned specific gifts (plural).

²⁶J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:33.

²⁷J. P. Lange, "The Epistle of Paul to the Romans," in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 70.

Paul did not regard his opportunity to preach the gospel as a burden that he had to bear or as a duty he had to fulfill. Rather he was "eager" to share the good news with everyone (v. 15).

"If one has the finest intellectual and formal preparation for preaching but is lacking in zeal, he cannot hope for much success."²⁸

The salutation (vv. 1-7) introduced Paul to his readers in a formal tone. However the explanation of his purpose in desiring to visit Rome (vv. 8-15) revealed a pastoral heart warm to the readers and the lost, ready to edify the saints and to evangelize sinners.²⁹

C. THEME 1:16-17

If anyone thought Paul had not visited Rome because he doubted the power of his gospel to work in that sophisticated environment, the apostle now clarified his reason. These verses conclude the epistolary introduction and transition into the body of the letter by stating Paul's theme.

1:16 Paul's third basic attitude toward the gospel now comes out. Not only did he feel obligated (v. 14) and eager (v. 15) to proclaim it, but he also felt unashamed to do so. The reason was that the gospel message has tremendous power. The Greek word translated "power" is *dunamis*, from which the word "dynamite" comes. Consequently some interpreters have concluded that Paul was speaking of the explosive radical way in which the gospel produces change in individual lives and even in history. However the context shows that the apostle was thinking of its intrinsic ability to affect change.

"The late evangelist Dwight L. Moody commented that the gospel is like a lion. All the preacher has to do is to open the door of the cage and get out of the way!"³⁰

God has the power to deliver physically (Exod. 14:13) and spiritually (Ps. 51:12). The basic outcome of salvation is soundness or wholeness. Salvation restores people to what they cannot experience because of sin. Salvation is an umbrella term; it covers all aspects of deliverance. The terms justification, redemption, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification describe different aspects of salvation.

²⁸Harrison, p. 18.

²⁹Marty L. Reid, "A Consideration of the Function of Rom 1:8-15 in Light of Greco-Roman Rhetoric," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:2 (June 1995):181-91, showed that verses 8-15 play an integral part in introducing the argument and rhetoric of Romans.

³⁰Mounce, p. 70.

"The inherent glory of the message of the gospel, as God's life-giving message to a dying world, so filled Paul's soul, that like his blessed Master, he "despised the shame." So, pray God, may all of us!"³¹

The gospel does not announce that everyone is safe because of what Jesus Christ has done, which is universalism. The gospel is only effective in those who believe it.³² Believe what? Believe the good news. What is the good news? It is the news that Jesus is the Christ (i.e., the Messiah whom God promised to send) and that He has done everything necessary to save us (cf. 1 John 2:2; 5:1). Note that Paul mentioned no other condition besides believing the good news in this crucial verse (cf. 4:5). He said nothing about our having to do anything in addition such as undergoing baptism, joining a church, pledging commitment, etc. The issue is believing good news and trusting Christ. Either a person does or does not do so.³³

The gospel has a special relevance to the Jew. The priority of Jewish evangelism was historical; it is not essential. That is, because God purposed to use Israel as His primary instrument in bringing blessing to the world (Exod. 19:5-6) He gave the Jews first opportunity to receive His Son. This was true during Jesus' earthly ministry (John 1:1) and following His ascension (Acts 1:8; 3:26). Paul also followed this pattern in his ministry (Acts 13:45-46; 28:25, 28). Notwithstanding the Great Commission makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus Christ has charged Christians with taking the gospel to everyone (Matt. 28:19-20). He has identified no group as that to which we must give priority in evangelism.

1:17 In this verse Paul explained what he meant when he said that when a person believes the gospel he or she is saved (v. 16). What makes the gospel powerful is its content. The salvation that God has provided and offers is in keeping with His righteous character (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21).

What did Paul mean by "the righteousness of God?"³⁴ It could be an attribute of God, either His rectitude or His faithfulness. It could be a status that God gives to people. Or it could be an activity of God, specifically His saving action.

³¹Newell, p. 18. He did not identify the source of his quotation.

³²See J. Ronald Blue, "Untold Billions: Are They Really Lost?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:562 (October-December 1981):338-50; Ramesh P. Richard, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):85-108.

³³See Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 201-17.

³⁴With the exception of 2 Cor 5:21, Paul used this phrase only in Romans where it appears eight times (1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3 [twice]).

"For Paul, as in the OT, 'righteousness of God' is a relational concept. Bringing together the aspects of activity and status, we can define it as *the act by which God brings people into right relationship with himself*."³⁵

The gospel makes the righteousness of God manifest.

What does "from faith to faith" (NASB) mean? Was Paul describing the way God has revealed His righteousness or how people should receive it? The position of this phrase in the sentence favors the first option. The idea might be that God's righteousness comes from one person who exercises faith to another person who exercises faith. Still, if that is what Paul intended, he should have used the Greek preposition *apo* that views "from" as a point of departure. Instead he used *ek* that indicates the basis of something (cf. 3:16; 5:1; Gal. 2:16). Probably the phrase refers to how people receive God's righteousness. The idea seems to be that faith is the method whereby we receive salvation whatever aspect of salvation may be in view. The NIV interpretation is probably correct: "by faith from first to last." We might say that every aspect of God's salvation comes to us only by faith. That is true whether we are speaking of justification (salvation from the penalty of sin), sanctification (salvation from the power of sin), or glorification (salvation from the presence of sin). Trusting God results in full salvation.

The words of Habakkuk 2:4 support Paul's statement. Faith is the vehicle that brings the righteousness of God to people. The person who believes the good news that the righteous God has proclaimed becomes righteous himself or herself. The Pharisees, one of which Paul had been, taught that righteousness came through keeping the Mosaic Law scrupulously (cf. Matt. 5:20). The gospel Paul proclaimed, on the other hand, was in harmony with what Habakkuk had revealed (cf. v. 2).

Verses 16-17 are the key verses in Romans because they state the theme of the revelation that follows. Paul's message was the gospel. He felt no shame declaring it but was eager to proclaim it because it was a message that can deliver everyone who believes it. It is a message of how a righteous God makes people righteous righteously. The theme of the gospel is the righteousness of God.³⁶

"Here we have the *text* of the whole Epistle of Romans: First, the words 'the gospel'—so dear to Paul, as will appear. Next, the universal saving power of this gospel is asserted. Then, the secret of the gospel's power—the revelation of God's righteousness on the principle of faith. Finally, the

³⁵Moo, p. 74. See pages 70-74 for the reasons this is the best conclusion. He also has a good excursus on "Righteousness' Language in Paul," pp. 79-90.

³⁶Moo believed that the gospel is the theme of Romans, pp. 22-30.

accord of all this with the Old Testament Scriptures: 'The righteous shall live by faith.'³⁷

This first section of Romans (1:1-17) introduces the subject of this treatise by presenting the gospel as a message that harmonizes with Old Testament revelation. It is a message that concerns Jesus, the Messiah and Lord. It is a powerful message since it has the power to save anyone who believes it.

II. THE NEED FOR GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS 1:18—3:20

Paul began his explanation of the gospel by demonstrating that there is a universal need for it. Every human being needs to trust in Jesus Christ because everyone lacks the righteousness that God requires before He will accept us.

"Paul implicitly acknowledges that 1:18—3:20 is an interruption in his exposition of the righteousness of God by reprising 1:17 in 3:21 . . . Some think that the 'revelation of God's wrath' is a product of the preaching of the gospel, so that 1:18—3:20 is as much 'gospel' as is 3:21—4:25 . . . But, although Paul clearly considers warning about judgment to come to be related to his preaching of the gospel (2:16), his generally positive use of 'gospel' language forbids us from considering God's wrath and judgment to be *part of* the gospel.

"We must consider 1:18—3:20 as a preparation for, rather than as part of, Paul's exposition of the gospel of God's righteousness."³⁸

A. THE NEED OF ALL PEOPLE 1:18-32

Perhaps Paul began by showing all people's need for God's righteousness first because he was the apostle to the Gentiles and his Roman readers were primarily Gentiles. His argument in 1:18—3:20 moves inward through a series of concentric circles of humanity.

1. The reason for human guilt 1:18

In this verse Paul explained why Gentiles need to hear the gospel and experience salvation.

God has revealed His wrath as well as His righteousness (v. 17) from heaven in the gospel.³⁹ As Paul would explain, the unfolding of history also reveals God's hatred toward sin and His judgment of sin. The moral devolution of mankind is not just a natural consequence of man's sinning but also a result of God's judgment of sinners. The final judgment of sin will occur in the eschaton (end times), but already God is pouring out His

³⁷Newell, p. 18.

³⁸Moo, p. 92.

³⁹Cranfield, 1:109-10.

wrath against sin to a lesser degree (cf. Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6). Paul described wrath as revealed from heaven because it comes from God who is in heaven.⁴⁰

"God's wrath is his divine displeasure with sin. We call it 'wrath' because it shares certain basic characteristics of human wrath. But because it is God's wrath it can have none of the sinful qualities of its analogical counterpart."⁴¹

"Ungodliness" means lack of reverence for God. Man's neglect of God and rebellion against God are evidences of ungodliness. "Unrighteousness" or "wickedness" (NIV) means injustice toward other human beings. We see it in any attitude or action that is unloving. Together these two words show humankind's failure to love God and other people as we should (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-39). Verses 19-27 demonstrate man's ungodliness, and verses 28-32 show his wickedness.

The "truth" refers to truth that people know about God (cf. v. 25). They suppress this truth by their wickedness.

". . . whenever the truth starts to exert itself and makes them feel uneasy in their moral nature, they hold it down, suppress it. Some drown its voice by rushing on into their immoralities; others strangle the disturbing voice by argument and by denial."⁴²

2. The ungodliness of mankind 1:19-27

1:19-20 These verses begin a discussion of "natural revelation." Natural revelation describes what everyone knows about God because of what God has revealed concerning Himself in nature. What He has revealed about Himself in Scripture is "special revelation." The creation bears testimony to its Maker, and every human being "hears" this witness (cf. Ps. 19).⁴³

"Napoleon, on a warship in the Mediterranean on a star-lit night, passed a group of his officers who were mocking at the idea of a God. He stopped, and sweeping his hand toward the stars, said, 'Gentlemen, you must get rid of those first!'"⁴⁴

Four things characterize this revelation. First, it is a clear testimony; everyone is aware of it ("it is evident [plain]"). Second, everyone can

⁴⁰G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 219. See the excursus on the wrath of God in Romans in Newell, pp. 40-46.

⁴¹Mounce, pp. 76-77.

⁴²Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 92-93.

⁴³See Bruce A. Baker, "Romans 1:18-21 and Presuppositional Apologetics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):280-98.

⁴⁴Newell, p. 29.

understand it. We can draw conclusions about the Creator from His creation.⁴⁵ Third, it has gone out since the creation of the world in every generation. Fourth, it is a limited revelation in that it does not reveal everything about God (e.g., His love and grace) but only some things (i.e., His power and deity). Natural revelation makes man responsible to respond to his Creator in worship and submission. However it does not give sufficient information for him to experience salvation. That is why everyone needs to hear the gospel.

"Utter uncompromising, abandonment of hope in *man* is the first preliminary to understanding or preaching the gospel."⁴⁶

1:21-23 Honoring God as God and giving Him thanks (v. 21) are our primary duties to God in view of who He is. Mythology and idolatry have resulted from man's need to identify some power greater than himself and his refusal to acknowledge God as that power. Men and women have elevated themselves to God's position (cf. Dan. 2:38; 3:1; 5:23). In our day, humanism has replaced the worship of individual human leaders in most western countries. Man has descended to the worship of animals as well (cf. Ps. 106:20). This is perhaps more characteristic of third world countries.

"This tragic process of human 'god-making' continues apace in our own day, and Paul's words have as much relevance for people who have made money or sex or fame their gods as for those who carved idols out of wood and stone."⁴⁷

Note the allusions to the creation story in the threefold division of the animal kingdom in verse 23.

1:24-25 The false religions that man has devised and to which Paul just referred constitute some of God's judgment on mankind for turning from Him. False religion is not in any sense good for mankind. It is a judgment from God, and it tends to keep people so distracted that they rarely deal with the true God.

"God's wrath mentioned in Romans 1 is not an active outpouring of divine displeasure but the removal of

⁴⁵"His invisible attributes . . . have been clearly seen" is an oxymoron.

⁴⁶Newell, p. 27.

⁴⁷Moo, p. 110. For a relevant exposition of verses 21-22, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, pp. 79-123.

restraint that allows sinners to reap the just fruits of their rebellion."⁴⁸

It is active in another sense, however. God gave man over (v. 24; cf. vv. 26, 28) by turning him over to the punishment his crime earned, as a judge does a prisoner. The third characteristic of man in rebellion against God that Paul identified after ignorance (v. 21) and idolatry (v. 23) is impurity (v. 24). Here Paul evidently had natural forms of moral uncleanness in view such as adultery and harlotry. He went on in verses 26-27 to describe even worse immorality, namely unnatural acts such as homosexuality.⁴⁹

Mankind exchanged the truth of God (v. 25; cf. v. 18) for "the lie" (literally). The lie in view is the contention that we should venerate someone or something in place of the true God (cf. Gen. 3:1-5; Matt. 4:3-10). Paul's concluding doxology underlined this folly.

1:26-27

Because mankind "exchanged" the truth for the lie God allowed him to degrade himself through his passions. The result was that he "exchanged" natural human functions for what is unnatural. In the Greek text the words translated "women" (*thelus*; v. 26) and "men" (*arsen*, v. 27) mean "females" and "males." Ironically the homosexuality described in these verses does not characterize females and males of other animal species, only human beings. Homosexuality is a perversion because it uses sex for a purpose contrary to those for which God created and intended it (Gen. 1:28).

"This need not demand the conclusion that every homosexual follows the practice in deliberate rebellion against God's prescribed order. What is true historically and theologically is in measure true, however, experientially."⁵⁰

AIDS, for example, is probably the consequence of man's rebellion against God rather than a special judgment from God. The "due penalty" is what man experiences as a result of God giving him over and letting him indulge his sinful desires (cf. 6:23).⁵¹

"Sin comes from the mind, which perverts the judgment. The effect of retribution is to abandon the mind to that depravity."⁵²

⁴⁸Mounce, p. 80.

⁴⁹Natural here means in keeping with how God has designed people, and unnatural refers to behavior that is contrary to how God has made us.

⁵⁰Harrison, p. 25.

⁵¹See P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:560 (October-December 1983):350-58.

⁵²Henri Maurier, *The Other Covenant*, p. 185.

"A contextual and exegetical examination of Romans 1:26-27 reveals that attempts by some contemporary writers to do away with Paul's prohibitions against present-day same-sex relations are false. Paul did not impose Jewish customs and rules on his readers; instead he addressed same-sex relations from the trans-cultural perspective of God's created order. God's punishment for sin is rooted in a sinful reversal of the created order. Nor was homosexuality simply a sin practiced by idolaters in Paul's day; it was a distorting consequence of the fall of the human race in the Garden of Eden. Neither did Paul describe homosexual acts by heterosexuals. Instead he wrote that homosexual activity was an exchange of the created order (heterosexuality) for a talionic perversion (homosexuality), which is never presented in Scripture as an acceptable norm for sexuality. Also Hellenistic pederasty does not fully account for the terms and logic of Romans 1:26-27 which refers to adult-adult mutuality. Therefore it is clear that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul condemned homosexuality as a perversion of God's design for human sexual relations."⁵³

3. The wickedness of mankind 1:28-32

The second key word in verse 18, "unrighteousness" (v. 29), reappears at the head of this list of man's sinful practices. It is a general word describing the evil effects in human relations that man's suppressing the knowledge of God produces. In the Greek text there is a word play that highlights God's just retribution. As people disapproved of the idea of retaining God in their thinking, so God gave them over to a disapproved mind (v. 28). This letting loose has led to all kinds of illogical and irrational behavior.

"People who have refused to acknowledge God end up with minds that are 'disqualified' from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. The result, of course, is that they do things that are 'not proper.' As in 1:21, Paul stresses that people who have turned from God are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God and his will. This tragic incapacity is the explanation for the apparently inexplicable failure of people to comprehend, let alone practice, biblical ethical principles. Only the work of the Spirit in 'renewing the mind [*nous*]' (Rom. 12:2) can overcome this deep-seated blindness and perversity."⁵⁴

⁵³David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:599 (July-September 1993):340. Pederasty is a form of sodomy between males, especially as practiced by a man with a boy. See also Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

⁵⁴Moo, p. 118.

Unrighteousness (v. 29; wickedness, NIV) is what is contrary to what is right or just. Wickedness (v. 29; evil, NIV) is what is vile and sinister. Greed (v. 29) is the drive to obtain more. Malice (depravity, NIV) describes resident moral evil. "Insolent" focuses on activities, "arrogant" on thoughts, and "boastful" on words.⁵⁵ The rest of these characteristics are self-evident.

The final step down in man's degradation is his promotion of wickedness (v. 32).⁵⁶ It is bad to practice these things, but it is worse to encourage others to practice them.

"Granted that commending evil is not, in the ultimate sense, worse than doing it, it is also true that in a certain respect the person who commits a sin under the influence of strong temptation is less reprehensible than the one who dispassionately agrees with and encourages a sin for which he or she feels no strong attraction him- or herself."⁵⁷

Paul's use of the past tense in verses 18-32 suggests that he was viewing humanity historically. Nevertheless his occasional use of the present tense shows that he observed many of these conditions in his own day. He was viewing mankind as a whole, not that every individual has followed this general pattern of departure from God.⁵⁸ One expositor labeled the four stages in man's tragic devolution that Paul explained as follows: intelligence (vv. 18-20), ignorance (vv. 21-23), indulgence (vv. 24-27), and impenitence (vv. 28-32).⁵⁹

B. THE NEED OF GOOD PEOPLE 2:1—3:8

In the previous section (1:18-32), Paul showed mankind condemned for its refusal to respond appropriately to general revelation. In this one (2:1—3:8), His subject is more man's failure to respond to special revelation. Since the Jews had more knowledge of this revelation than the Gentiles, they are primarily in view. As in the previous section, specific accusations follow general terms for sin (cf. 1:18 with 1:23, 26-32; and 2:1-16 with 2:17-29).

Paul addressed those people who considered themselves exceptions to humankind's general sinfulness in this section of the epistle. Obviously many people could say in his day, and still more say in ours, that they are not as bad as the people Paul described in chapter 1. The writer dealt with this objection more generally in verses 1-16 and more specifically about Jewish objectors in verses 17-29.

⁵⁵Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 93-97.

⁵⁶This is the longest list of this type in the New Testament. Its purpose is to show the scope of social evils that results when God hands people over to a depraved mind after they refuse to acknowledge Him.

⁵⁷Moo, p. 122.

⁵⁸For another exposition of 1:18-32 see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Pattern for Maturity*, pp. 52-59. He also offered expositions of 6:11-23 (2); 7:1-14; 8:1-8; 8:1-13; 12:1-21; 14:1-13; 14:13-23; 14:22—15:3; and 15:1-7 in this volume.

⁵⁹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:518-19.

"Paul has still his statement in view, that the Gospel is the only power of God for salvation, and nothing to be ashamed of. If Judaism can save men, the Gospel is an impertinence; hence the radical failure of the Jew must be shown."⁶⁰

"In chap. 2 . . . it is the second person singular, 'you,' that Paul uses in making his accusation (2:1-5, 17-29). This does not mean that Paul is now accusing his readers of these things; were he to do that, the second person plural would have been needed. Rather, Paul utilizes here, and sporadically throughout the letter, a literary style called *diatribe*. Diatribe style, which is attested in several ancient authors as well as elsewhere in the NT (e.g., James), uses the literary device of an imaginary dialogue with a student or opponent. Elements of this style include frequent questions, posed by the author to his conversation partner or by the conversation partner, emphatic rejections of possible objections to a line of argument using *me genoito* ('May it never be!'), and the direct address of one's conversation partner or opponent."⁶¹

1. God's principles of judgment 2:1-16

Before showing the guilt of moral and religious people before God (vv. 17-29), Paul set forth the principles by which God will judge everyone (vv. 1-16). By so doing, he warned the self-righteous.

2:1-4 "Therefore" seems more logically to relate back to 1:18-19 than to 1:21-32. Paul addressed those people who might think they were free from God's wrath because they had not "practiced" the things to which Paul had just referred (1:29-32). The apostle now warned them that they had indeed "practiced" the same things (v. 1). He seems to have been thinking as Jesus did when our Lord corrected His hearers' superficial view of sin (e.g., Matt. 5—7). Evil desires constitute sin as well as evil actions.

The first principle by which God judges is that He judges righteously (v. 2). He judges on the basis of what really exists, not what merely appears to be. Consequently those who have practiced the same sin, though perhaps not in the same way, should not think they will escape judgment (v. 3). Rather than acting like judges of the immoral they should view themselves as sinners subject to God's judgment. They should not misinterpret God's failure to judge them already as an indication that they are blameless. They should realize that God is simply giving them time to repent (v. 4; cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

⁶⁰Stifler, p. 36.

⁶¹Moo, p. 125.

"Repentance plays a surprisingly small part in Paul's teaching, considering its importance in contemporary Judaism. Probably this is because the coming of Christ had revealed to Paul that acceptance with God requires a stronger action than the word 'repentance' often connoted at the time."⁶²

2:5-11 God's wrath is increasing against sinners while He waits (v. 5). Each day that the self-righteous person persists in his self-righteousness God adds more guilt to his record. God will judge him one day (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). That day will be the day when God pours out His wrath on every sinner and the day when people will perceive His judgment as righteous. This judgment is in contrast to the judgment that the self-righteous person passes on himself when he considers himself guiltless (v. 1).

The second principle of God's judgment is that it will deal with what every person really did (v. 6). It will not deal with what we intended or hoped or wanted to do (cf. Ps. 62:12; Matt. 16:27; et al.).

"A man's destiny on Judgment Day will depend not on whether he has known God's will but on whether he has done it."⁶³

Paul probably meant that if a person obeys God perfectly, he or she will receive eternal life. Those who do not receive wrath. Later he would clarify that no one can obey God perfectly, and so all are under His wrath (3:23-24).⁶⁴

Another view is that eternal life is not only a free gift, but it is also a reward for good deeds. On the one hand we obtain eternal life as a gift only by faith (3:20; 4:5; cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40; Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:5). However in another sense as Christians we experience eternal life to the extent that we do good deeds (cf. 6:22; Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; John 10:10; 12:25-26; 17:3; Gal. 6:8). Paul's point was this. Those who are self-righteous and unbelieving store up something that will come on them in the future, namely condemnation (v. 5). Likewise those who are humble and believing store up something that will come on them in the future, namely glory, honor, and immortality. Paul was speaking of the believer's rewards here.⁶⁵

⁶²Ibid., p. 134.

⁶³A. M. Hunter, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 36. Cf. Matt. 25:31-46.

⁶⁴Moo, pp. 139-42.

⁶⁵See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 28, 135-45.

Other interpreters believe Paul meant that a person's perseverance demonstrates that his heart is regenerate.⁶⁶ However that is not what Paul said here. He said those who persevere will receive eternal life. One must not import a certain doctrine of perseverance into the text rather than letting the text speak for itself.

Verse 8 restates the reward of the self-righteous (cf. 1:18). The point of verses 9 and 10 is that the true basis of judgment is not whether one is a Jew or a Greek, whether he was outwardly moral or immoral. It is rather what he really does, whether he is truly moral or immoral. God will deal with the Jew first because his privilege was greater. He received special revelation as well as natural revelation.

The third principle of God's judgment is that He will treat everyone evenhandedly (v. 11). There is equal justice for all in God's court.⁶⁷

2:12-16 The Gentiles do not have the Mosaic Law in the sense that God did not give it to them. Therefore He will not judge them by that law. The Jews in Paul's day did have it, and God would judge them by it (v. 12).⁶⁸

It is not hearing the law that makes a person acceptable to God, but doing what it commands (v. 13). "Justified" is a legal term that is suitable in this discussion of law observance. Justification is a legal verdict. It reflects a person's position under the law. The justified person is one whom God sees as righteous in relation to His law (cf. Deut. 25:1). The justified person is not necessarily blameless; he may have done things that are wrong. Nevertheless in the eyes of the law he is not culpable. He does not have to pay for his crimes. Paul said in verse 13 that God would declare righteous the person who did not just listen to the Mosaic Law but did what it required. The Law warned that anything short of perfect obedience to it, even reading or studying it or hearing it preached and taught, which Jews relied on, made a person guilty before God (Deut. 27:26; cf. Gal. 3:10). Moses therefore urged the Israelites to accept and believe in the promised Messiah (e.g., Deut. 18:15).

Even Gentiles who do not have the Mosaic Law know that they should do things that are right and not do things that are wrong (v. 14). Right and wrong are the basic elements of the Mosaic Law. Paul did not mean that Gentiles are indifferent to any law except what they invent in their own

⁶⁶E.g., John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 445; Cranfield, 1:147.

⁶⁷Verses 6-11 contain one unit of thought. Note the chiasmic structure of this passage. However in this chiasm the emphasis is not on the central element, as is common, but on the beginning and the end, namely that God will judge everyone equitably and impartially.

⁶⁸See Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Paul, the Law, Jews, and Gentiles: A Contextual and Exegetical Reading of Romans 2:12-16," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999):37-51.

self-interest. He meant that they have a law that is instinctive, namely an intuitive perception of what is right and what is wrong. All people have this.

In addition to this innate sense of morality, Gentiles also have consciences (v. 15). The New Testament presents the human conscience as a computer-like faculty. It has no preprogramed data in it, but whatever a person experiences programs his conscience. If he learns that lying is wrong, for example, his conscience will from then on bring that information to his mind in appropriate situations. Therefore some individuals who grow up in cultures that value a particular practice that other cultures abhor, such as deception or treachery, have no conscience about being deceptive or practicing treachery. All people grow up learning that some things that are truly bad are bad and other things that are truly good are good. Thus our conscience, while not a completely reliable guide, is a help as we seek to live life morally.⁶⁹

Verse 16 completes Paul's earlier statement that God will judge impartially (vv. 11-13) and forms the end of an *inclusio* dealing with judgment that began with verses 1-5. Verses 14-15 are somewhat parenthetical in the flow of his argument. They qualify his statement that the Gentiles have no law (v. 12). In verse 16 his point is that God's impartial judgment will include people's secret thoughts as well as their overt acts. Both thoughts and actions constitute deeds (v. 6). Christ Jesus will be God's agent of judgment (cf. Acts 17:31). "According to my gospel" means that the gospel Paul preached included the prospect of judgment. Throughout this section (vv. 1-16) the judgment of unbelievers (i.e., the great white throne judgment, Rev. 20:11-15) is in view.

In summary, to convict any self-righteous person of his guilt before God Paul reminded his readers of three principles by which God will evaluate all people. He will judge righteously, in terms of reality, not appearance (v. 2). He will judge people because of their deeds, both covert and overt (v. 6). Moreover He will judge impartially, not because of how much or how little privilege they enjoyed but how they responded to the truth they had (v. 11).

This last principle has raised a question for many people. Will God condemn someone who has never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ if he or she responds appropriately to the limited truth that he or she has? Paul later showed that no one responds appropriately to the truth that he or she has (3:23). All fail so all stand condemned. He also made it very clear that it is impossible to enjoy salvation without trusting in Jesus Christ (1:16-17; 10:9; cf. John 14:6). That is why Jesus gave the Great Commission and why the gospel is so important (1:16-17).

⁶⁹See C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*; Roy B. Zuck, "The Doctrine of Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):329-40.

". . . Paul agreed with the Jewish belief that justification could, in theory, be secured through works. Where Paul disagreed with Judaism was in his belief that the power of sin prevents any person, even the Jew who depends on his or her covenant status, from actually achieving justification in that manner. While, therefore, one could be justified by doing the law in theory, in practice it is impossible . . ."70

2. The guilt of the Jews 2:17-29

Even though the Jews had the advantages of the Mosaic Law and circumcision, their boasting and fruitlessness offset these advantages. Divinely revealed religion is no substitute for trust and obedience toward God. Verses 17-29 are similar to 1:18-32. In 2:17-29, Paul showed that Jews are guilty before God just as he formerly proved all humanity guilty. In both sections he pointed out that man knew the truth but rejected it and consequently became guilty of idolatry, sensuality, and immorality.

"In the previous section Paul addressed his Jewish readers in a relatively restrained manner. But here the mood changed. Once again he employed the diatribe style that he used in the opening verses of chap. 2. His tone became quite severe as he laid out before them the absolute necessity of bringing their conduct into line with their profession. From this point on to the end of the second major division (Rom 3:20), we hear Paul the preacher convincing his listeners of their need for a different kind of righteousness. Although in another letter he claimed that his preaching was not eloquent (1 Cor 2:1-5), it is hard to deny that here in Romans we are dealing with the dynamic rhetoric of an evangelist bent on persuasion."⁷¹

"Paul here claims for the Jew nothing more than what the Jews of his day were claiming for themselves; every item on the list in vv. 17-20 is paralleled in Jewish literature of the time."⁷²

2:17-20 Paul had been speaking of Jews in verses 1-16, but now he identified them by name. The Jews were very self-righteous. Paul explained the basis of their boasting in these verses.

The name "Jew" contrasts with "Greek" and calls attention to nationality.⁷³ The Jews gloried in being members of God's chosen nation (cf. Exod. 19:5-6). They relied on the Mosaic Law because God Himself had given it to Moses on Mt. Sinai. They boasted in their knowledge of God that they obtained through that covenant. They had a relatively

⁷⁰Moo, p. 155.

⁷¹Mounce, pp. 97-98.

⁷²Moo, p. 159.

⁷³Sanday and Headlam, p. 64.

precise understanding of what is more and less important to God (cf. Phil. 1:10). They looked down on non-Jews as those whom they guided even though, as Paul pointed out earlier, the Gentiles have some light and law themselves.

In these verses Paul first referred to God's gifts to the Jews (v. 17) and then to the superior capabilities these gifts conferred on them (v. 18). Finally he mentioned the role the Jews somewhat pretentiously gloried in playing. God had called them to enlighten the Gentiles with these gifts and capabilities (vv. 19-20).⁷⁴

2:21-24 With a series of rapier-like interrogations (rhetorical questions) Paul poked holes in the Jews' hypocritical facade. Evidently it was not uncommon for Jews to rob the temples of the pagan Gentiles (v. 22; cf. Acts 19:37). They may have done this by using the precious metals from idolatrous articles stolen from pagan temples (cf. Deut. 7:26).⁷⁵ By doing so, they betrayed their own idolatry, which was love of wealth. Furthermore rather than staying away from what they professed to abhor they went after pagan idols. The Jews' Gentile neighbors saw their inconsistency and despised Yahweh because of it (v. 24). The Jews did not apply their own teaching to themselves. Paul backed up his claim with a quotation from Isaiah 52:5.

Undoubtedly Paul did not mean that all Jews practiced these sins, but these sins represented the contradiction between claim and conduct that marked Judaism.

2:25-27 Next to the Mosaic Law the Jews boasted almost equally in their circumcision. Some of them believed that God would not permit any circumcised male to enter perdition.⁷⁶ They felt this rite guaranteed their acceptance by God (as some Christians believe baptism guarantees salvation). Paul reminded such people that reality is more important than profession and obedience more vital than testimony. Circumcision would not shield them from God's wrath if they failed to do all He commanded.

". . . in contrast to Jewish teachers, who held that only a radical decision to renounce the covenant invalidated one's circumcision, Paul argues that simple transgression of the law can have the same effect."⁷⁷

⁷⁴Godet, p. 127.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 129; et al.

⁷⁶Harrison, p. 34.

⁷⁷Moo, p. 169.

In our day cans and bottles have labels on them to indicate what is inside. Circumcision was a label and implied that the Jew was obedient to God. However if he was not completely obedient the label was not only worthless but deceptive. The contents of the can are more important than the label. Similarly if a Gentile was completely obedient to God the absence of the label of circumcision was not of major consequence. The Jews had put more emphasis on the presence of the label than on the contents of the can. Paul's point was that disobedience brings condemnation and perfect obedience theoretically brings salvation, regardless of whether one is a Jew or a Gentile.

The reference to the "letter" (v. 27) probably means that the Jews had the Law written down.

2:28-29

We now discover why Paul chose to address his fellow Israelites as Jews in this section (vv. 17-29). The word "Jew" comes from the name "Judah," which means praise. Paul was saying the person who really praises God is not one who merely wears the label of circumcision but one whose obedience to God is genuine. Such a person has a circumcized heart (cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Ezek. 44:9). Heart circumcision is a spiritual operation that the Holy Spirit performs, not a physical operation that conforms to the letter of the Mosaic Law. The truly obedient person will not only praise God, but God will also praise him. He will not just receive the praise of men for his professed obedience to God.

"These verses [vv. 25-29] must be kept in their context, which is that Paul is dealing with Jews and making a distinction between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. He is not teaching that every Gentile Christian is a spiritual Jew. Rather, he is teaching that every Jew is not a full Jew. A completed Jew is one who has had both circumcisions, the circumcision of the flesh, which is outward in obedience to the Abrahamic covenant, and an inward circumcision of the heart as an act of obedience to the new covenant."⁷⁸

In verses 17-29 Paul's point was that perfect obedience is more important than religious privilege. Even though the Jews boasted in outward matters, the law and circumcision, they were guilty of failing God inwardly as were the Gentiles. Really a god-fearing Gentile was more pleasing to God than a disobedient Jew because God delights in obedience.

⁷⁸Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 128-29. See also Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, p. 86; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 195-98.

3. Answers to objections 3:1-8

In chapter 2 Paul showed that God's judgment of all people rests on character rather than ceremony. He put the Jew on the same level as the Gentile regarding standing before God. Still God Himself made a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In 3:1-8, Paul dealt with that apparent inconsistency. He did this so there would be no question in the minds of his Jewish audience that they were guilty before God and needed to trust in Jesus Christ. The passage affirms the continuing faithfulness of God to His covenant people but clarifies that His faithfulness in no way precludes His judging sinful Jews.

"In thus allowing the Roman Christians to 'listen in' on this dialogue, Paul warns his mainly Gentile audience that they should not interpret the leveling of distinctions between Jew and Gentile in terms of God's judgment and salvation as the canceling of all the privileges of Israel."⁷⁹

3:1-2 Paul asked four rhetorical questions in this section (vv. 1-8), questions that could have been in the mind of a Jewish objector. Probably Paul was simply posing these questions and objections to himself to clarify his view for his readers. "Then what" (Gr. *ti oun*) appears in Romans to raise questions about what Paul has taught to advance his argument (cf. 3:9; 4:1; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 19, 30; 11:7).

We could paraphrase the first question as follows. If Jews and Gentiles are both guilty before God, what advantage is there in being a Jew? Particularly what advantage is there in being circumcised? The Old Testament regarded being a Jew and circumcision as privileges.

There are many advantages to being a circumcised Jew. Paul only gave the most important one here (v. 2), but later he referred to others (9:4-5). The phrase "oracles of God" refers to special revelation. The word "oracles" (Gr. *logia*) stresses the fact that the Old Testament, and the Mosaic Law in particular, was the very utterance of God preserved and handed down by earlier generations (cf. Acts. 7:38; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11).⁸⁰ "Entrusted" highlights Israel's responsibility to guard and to propagate what she had received as a treasure.

3:3-4 Paul's second question was this. God will not forsake His promises to bless the nation since some of the Israelites proved unfaithful will He? The objection Paul voiced calls attention to the promises God had given Israel in the Old Testament covenants. These too constituted an advantage for the Jews.

⁷⁹Moo, p. 180.

⁸⁰Cf. Sanday and Headlam pp. 70-71; Harrison, p. 35.

By referring to the unbelief of the Jews (v. 3) Paul was looking at the root of their unfaithfulness to God. Of the generation that received the law at Sinai, for example, only two adults proved faithful, Caleb and Joshua. Still God brought the whole nation into Canaan as He had promised, though the unbelieving generation died in the wilderness.

Paul agreed. God would remain "true" (true to His word, reliable, trustworthy) to bless Israel as He had promised (v. 4). God would even be faithful if everyone else proved unfaithful, not just if some proved unfaithful. Paul cited David's testimony to God's faithfulness after David's own unfaithfulness as historic support.

3:5-6 The third question connects with David's situation (v. 4). Since the Jews' failings set off God's righteousness more sharply by contrast, might not God deal more graciously with the Jews in His judgment of them? Surely He would not be unrighteous in failing to take that into consideration, would He?

Evidently Paul felt constrained to explain that he was "speaking in human terms" or "using a human argument" because he, representing an objector, had suggested that God was unjust. Paul did not want his readers to conclude that he really thought God was unfaithful to His own person and word. He was just saying that for the sake of the argument.

"It [the technical term 'I am speaking in human terms'] constitutes an apology for a statement which, but for the apology, would be too bold, almost blasphemous."⁸¹

Paul's answer was this. God will not show favoritism to the Jews even though by their unfaithfulness they glorify the faithfulness of God. If He did so, He would be partial and not qualified to sit in judgment on humankind.

3:7-8 The fourth question is very similar to the third. Perhaps Paul raised it as a response to his immediately preceding answer (v. 6). It clarifies the folly of the idea expressed in the third question. What an objector might really be saying in question three comes out in question four. If my lying, for example, glorifies God by showing Him to be the only perfectly truthful person, why does God punish me for lying? Paul had been stressing reality and priorities in chapter 2. This objection gets down to that level. If circumcision is of secondary importance compared to perfect obedience to God, is not sinning of secondary importance to glorifying God?

⁸¹David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 396.

Paul's reply was that in spite of accusations to the contrary he had not taught that the end justifies the means. Circumcision was secondary, but it was not sinful. God will not overlook sin, though He will overlook uncircumcision (2:26-29). If anyone thinks that God should overlook his sinning because in a sense it glorifies God, that person deserves condemnation (v. 8). Paul implied that this objection is so absurd that it is not worth entertaining.

In verses 1-8 Paul raised and answered four objections that a Jew might have offered to squirm out from under the guilty verdict Paul had pronounced on him in chapter 2. The essential objections are as follows.

1. The Jews are a privileged people (vv. 1-2).
2. God will remain faithful to the Jews despite their unfaithfulness to Him (vv. 3-4).
3. God will be merciful since the Jews' failings have magnified God's righteousness.
4. God will overlook the Jews' sins since they contribute to the glory of God.

Self-righteous people still raise these objections. Some people assume that because God has blessed them He will not condemn them. Some believe the character of God prohibits His condemning them. Some think that even though they have sinned God will be merciful and not condemn them. Some feel that since everything we do glorifies God in some way God would be unjust to condemn them.

"Thousands of so-called 'church-members' not only have never been brought under real conviction of sin and guilt and personal danger, but rise in anger like the Jews of Paul's day when one preaches their danger directly to them!"⁸²

C. THE GUILT OF ALL HUMANITY 3:9-20

Having now proven all people, Jews and Gentiles, under God's wrath Paul drove the final nail in mankind's spiritual coffin by citing Scriptural proof.

- 3:9 The phrase "What then?" introduces a conclusion to the argument that all people are guilty before God. Paul identified himself with the Jews about whom he had recently been speaking. Jews are not better (more obedient) than Gentiles even though they received greater privileges from God. Being "under sin" means being under its domination and condemnation.

". . . the problem with people is not just that they commit sins; their problem is that they are enslaved to sin."⁸³

⁸²Newell, p. 78.

⁸³Moo, p. 201.

3:10-18 Paul was writing to a primarily Gentile congregation so he concluded rather than began his argument with an appeal to Scripture.⁸⁴ The collection of passages Paul used both affirmed the universality of sin (vv. 10-12) and showed its pervasive inroads into all areas of individual and corporate life (vv. 13-18).

In verses 10-12 statement of the universality of sin opens and closes the passage. Sin has affected human intellect, emotions, and volition. Note the repetition of "none" as well as "all" and "not even one," all universal terms. In verses 13-18 Paul described the words (vv. 13-14), acts (vv. 15-17), and attitudes (v. 18) of man as tainted by sin.

This passage is one of the most forceful in Scripture that deals with the total depravity of man. Total depravity does not mean that every person is as bad as he or she could be. It means that sin has affected every part of his or her being and consequently there is nothing anyone can do to commend himself or herself to a holy God.

"Depravity means that man fails the test of pleasing God. He [sic] denotes his unmeritoriousness in God's sight. This failure is total in that (a) it affects all aspects of man's being, and (b) it affects all people."⁸⁵

The statement that "there is none who seeks after God" (v. 11) means that no one seeks God without God prompting him or her to do so (cf. John 6:44-46). It does not mean that people are constitutionally incapable of seeking God. People can and should seek God (Acts 17:26-27), and they are responsible for not doing so.

"Paul's portrayal of the unrighteous person may seem overly pessimistic to many contemporaries. After all, do we not all know certain individuals who live rather exemplary lives apart from Christ? Certainly they do not fit the description just laid out. Although it may be true that many of our acquaintances are not as outwardly wicked as the litany would suggest, we must remember that they are also benefactors of a civilization deeply influenced by a pervasive Judeo-Christian ethic. Take away the beneficent influence of Christian social ethics and their social behavior would be considerably different."⁸⁶

⁸⁴Contrast the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who took the opposite approach.

⁸⁵Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 218-19.

⁸⁶Mounce, p. 110.

Verse 18 concludes the quotations by giving the root problem (cf. 1:18-32).

"It is no kindness, but a terrible wrong, to hide from a criminal the sentence that must surely overtake him unless pardoned; for a physician to conceal from a patient a cancer that will destroy him unless quickly removed; for one acquainted with the hidden pitfalls of a path he beholds someone taking, not to warn him of his danger!"⁸⁷

3:19-20

Paul added that whatever the law, here the Old Testament, says it addresses to those involved in it, namely all the Jews. He wrote this to take the ground out from under a Jewish reader who might try to say that the passages just quoted refer only to the godless. The result of its condemnation is that no one will be able to open his mouth in his own defense (cf. Rev. 20:11-14). "All the world" describes all of humanity again.

"Probably Paul is using an implicit 'from the greater to the lesser' argument: if Jews, God's chosen people, cannot be excluded from the scope of sin's tyranny, then it surely follows that Gentiles, who have no claim on God's favor, are also guilty."⁸⁸

The purpose of the law was not to provide people with a series of steps that would lead them to heaven. It was to expose their inability to merit heaven (Gal. 3:24). Jesus had previously said that no one carries out the law completely (John 7:19). Paul had more to say about the works of the law (i.e., works done in obedience to the law, good works) in Romans (cf. Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 9-10). If someone breaks only one law, he or she is a lawbreaker. The law is similar to a chain. If someone breaks even one link, the chain cannot save. If someone wants to earn God's commendation of being perfectly righteous, he or she must obey God's law perfectly (cf. Matt. 5:48). It is impossible therefore to earn justification (a righteous verdict) by performing the works that God's law requires.⁸⁹ Verse 20 probably serves to confirm human accountability rather than giving a reason for it.⁹⁰

Every human being needs the gospel because everyone is a sinner and is under God's condemnation. In this first major section of Romans (1:18—3:20), Paul proved the universal sinfulness of humankind. He first showed the need of all people generally

⁸⁷Newell, pp. 85-86.

⁸⁸Moo, p. 206.

⁸⁹See Kenneth W. Allen, "Justification by Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:538 (April-June 1978):109-16.

⁹⁰Moo, p. 206.

(1:18-32). Then he dealt with the sinfulness of self-righteous people particularly (2:1—3:8). He set forth three principles by which God judges (2:1-16), proved the guilt of Jews, God's chosen people (2:17-29), and answered four objections Jews could offer to his argument (3:1-8). Then he concluded by showing that the Old Testament also taught the depravity of every human being (3:9-20).

III. THE IMPUTATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS 3:21—5:21

In beginning the next section of his argument Paul returned to the major subject of this epistle, the righteousness of God (v. 21; cf. 1:17). He also repeated the need for faith (v. 22; cf. 1:16) and summarized his point that everyone is guilty before God (v. 22; cf. 1:18—3:20). This brief recapitulation introduces his explanation of the salvation that God provides for guilty sinners that follows.

"The first main division of the epistle forms a powerful negative argument for the second, and was evidently so intended. Since man is a sinner with no help in himself and none in the law, what is left to him but to look to the mercy of God? . . . In a court of justice it is only after every defense has failed and the law itself has been shown to be broken, it is only at this point that the appeal is made to the judge for his clemency. The epistle has brought us to such a point."⁹¹

A. THE DESCRIPTION OF JUSTIFICATION 3:21-26

Paul began by explaining the concept of justification.⁹²

"We now come to the unfolding of that word which Paul in Chapter One declares to be the very heart of the gospel . . ."⁹³

3:21 The "righteousness of God" here refers to God's method of bringing people into right relationship with Himself. His method is apart from Law (cf. v. 20). The definite article before "Law" is absent in the Greek text, though it probably refers to the Mosaic Law. Moreover it "has been manifested" (perfect tense in Greek, "stands manifested"), namely through the coming of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament revealed that this would be God's method even before He appeared. The reference to the Old Testament as the law and the prophets, two major sections of the Hebrew Bible, prepares the way for chapter 4. There Paul discussed Abraham and David, two representatives of these sections of Scripture.

⁹¹Stifler, p. 58.

⁹²See Carl F. H. Henry, "Justification: A Doctrine in Crisis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:1 (March 1995):57-65, for discussion of the crisis that Protestant Catholic rapprochement poses for the doctrine of justification.

⁹³Newell, p. 92.

3:22 God's righteousness becomes man's possession and begins to operate in his life through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 28; cf. Gal. 2:16; Mark 11:22).⁹⁴ Here Paul introduced the object of faith for the first time (cf. 1:16-17). He never said that people obtain salvation because of their faith in Christ, by the way. This would encourage the idea that our faith makes a contribution to our salvation and has some merit. Faith simply takes what God gives. It adds nothing to the gift.

"Faith . . . plays a double part in justification. It is the disposition which God accepts, and which He imputes as righteousness; and it is at the same time the instrument whereby every one may appropriate for his own personal advantage this *righteousness of faith*."⁹⁵

Many writers have described faith as the hand of the heart. It does no work to earn salvation but only accepts a gift that someone else provides.

"The righteousness of God is not put 'upon' any one. That is a Romish idea,—still held, alas, among Protestants who cannot escape the conception of righteousness as a something bestowed upon us, rather than a Divine reckoning about us."⁹⁶

There is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles concerning their being "under sin" (v. 9). Likewise there is no distinction regarding the manner by which Jews and Gentiles obtain salvation. All receive salvation by faith.

3:23 All must come to God by faith in Jesus Christ because all have sinned and fallen short of (i.e., lack) God's glory (cf. Mark 10:21). The glory of God probably refers to the majesty of His person.⁹⁷ Sin separates people from fellowship with a holy God. We lack both the character of God and the fellowship of God because of sin.

3:24 "We now come to the greatest single verse in the entire Bible on the manner of justification by faith: We entreat you, study this verse. We have seen many a soul, upon understanding it, come into peace."⁹⁸

⁹⁴Though *pistis*, "faith," can also mean "faithfulness," Paul almost always meant "faith" when he used this word. Strong contextual clues indicate when he meant "faithfulness."

⁹⁵Godet, p. 147. Cf. Newell, p. 108.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 110.

⁹⁷Harrison, p. 41.

⁹⁸Newell, p. 114.

It is all who believe (v. 22), not all who have sinned (v. 23), who receive justification (v. 24).⁹⁹ Justification is an act, not a process. And it is something God does, not man.

As mentioned previously, justification is a forensic (legal) term. On the one hand it means to acquit (Exod. 23:7; Deut. 25:1; Acts 13:39). On the other positive side it means to *declare* righteous. It does not mean to *make* righteous.

"The word never means to make one righteous, or holy; but to account one righteous. Justification is not a change wrought by God in us, but a change of our relation to God."¹⁰⁰

Justification describes a person's status in the sight of the law, not the condition of his or her character. The condition of one's character and conduct is that with which sanctification deals.

"Do not confuse justification and sanctification. Sanctification is the process whereby God makes the believer more and more like Christ. Sanctification may change from day to day. Justification never changes. When the sinner trusts Christ, God declares him righteous, and that declaration will never be repealed. God looks on us and deals with us as though we had never sinned at all!"¹⁰¹

God, the judge, sees the justified sinner in Christ (i.e., in terms of his relation to His Son) with whom the Father is well pleased (8:1; cf. Phil. 3:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). Justification includes forgiveness but is larger than forgiveness.

"God declares that He reckons righteous the ungodly man who ceases from all works, and believes on Him (God), as the God who, on the ground of Christ's shed blood, 'justifies the ungodly' (4.5). He declares such an one righteous: reckoning to him all the absolute value of Christ's work,—of His expiating death, and of His resurrection, and placing him *in Christ*: where he is the righteousness of God: for Christ is that! . . .

"We do not need therefore a personal 'standing' before God at all. This is the perpetual struggle of legalistic

⁹⁹See Blue, pp. 338-50.

¹⁰⁰Newell, p. 114. See also Moo, p. 227.

¹⁰¹Wiersbe, 1:522.

theology,—to state how we can have a 'standing' before God. But to maintain this is still to think of us as separate from Christ (instead of dead and risen with Him), and needing such a 'standing.' But if we are in Christ in such an absolute way that Christ Himself has been made unto us righteousness, we are immediately relieved from the need of having any 'standing.' Christ is our standing, Christ Himself! And Christ being the righteousness of God, we, being thus utterly and vitally in Christ before God, have no other place but in Him. We are 'the righteousness of God in Christ.'"¹⁰²

God bestows justification freely as a gift. The basis for His giving it is His own grace, not anything in the sinner.

"Grace means pure unrecompensed kindness and favor."¹⁰³

Grace (Gr. *charis*) is the basis for joy (*chara*), and it leads to thanksgiving (*eucharistia*).

The redemption that is in (i.e., came by) Christ Jesus is the means God used to bring the gift of justification to human beings. The Greek word for redemption used here (*apolutroseos*) denotes a deliverance obtained by purchase (cf. Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:18; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13). Everywhere in the New Testament this Greek word, when used metaphorically, refers to "deliverance effected through the death of Christ for the retributive wrath of a holy God and the merited penalty of sin . . ."¹⁰⁴

Paul's use of "Christ Jesus" rather than the normal "Jesus Christ" stresses the fact that God provided redemption by supplying the payment. That payment was the Messiah (Christ) promised in the Old Testament who was Jesus of Nazareth.

Though the question of who received the ransom price has divided scholars, Scripture is quite clear that Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to God (Luke 23:46).

"Before you leave verse 24, apply it to yourself, if you are a believer. Say of yourself: 'God has declared me righteous without any cause in me, by His grace, through the redemption from sin's penalty that is in Christ Jesus.' It is

¹⁰²Newell, pp. 100, 104.

¹⁰³Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*apolutrosis*," p. 65.

the bold, believing use *for ourselves* of the Scripture we learn, that God desires; and not merely the knowledge of Scripture."¹⁰⁵

3:25 Paul stressed faith in this verse. Therefore we should probably understand his reference to the public display of Christ as being an allusion to His presentation in the gospel rather than to His crucifixion.

There are two possible meanings of "propitiation" (NASB) or "sacrifice of propitiation" (NIV). The Greek word (*hilasterion*) is an adjective that can substitute for a noun. It means having placating or expiating force.¹⁰⁶ It could refer to Jesus Christ as the place where God satisfied His wrath and removed our sins. This is the substantival usage translated "propitiation." In favor of this interpretation is the use of this Greek word to translate the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:17, LXX; Heb. 9:5). However, it seems more natural to take *hilasterion* as referring to Jesus Christ as the sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath and removed our sins. This is the normal adjectival use translated "sacrifice of atonement" (cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Jesus Christ was the sacrifice, but the place where God made atonement was the Cross.

The translation "through faith in His blood" (NIV) correctly represents the word order in the Greek text. Paul elsewhere urged faith in the person of Jesus Christ (vv. 22, 26). Probably Paul mentioned His blood as representing His life poured out as a sacrifice of atonement instead of the person of Christ here to draw attention to what made His sacrifice atoning (cf. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20).¹⁰⁷

The full idea of the first part of the verse would then be this. God has publicly displayed Jesus Christ in the gospel as a sacrifice of atonement that satisfied God's wrath and removed our sins. His sacrifice becomes efficacious for those who trust in Him.

The antecedent of "this" (NASB) is the redemption (v. 24) God provided in Christ, as is clear in the NIV translation. Another reason God provided a sacrifice of atonement was to justify (declare righteous) God's own character (i.e., to vindicate Him). This was necessary because God had not finally dealt with sins committed before Jesus died. God had shown forbearance, not out of weakness or sentimentality but because He planned to provide a final sacrifice in the future, namely at the Cross.

¹⁰⁵Newell, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶A *Greek-English . . .*, s.v. "*hilasterios*," p. 301.

¹⁰⁷This then is a metonymy, in which the name of one thing appears in the place of another associated with it.

"Passed over" (NASB) or "left . . . unfinished" (NIV) is not the same as "forgave." Two different though related Greek words describe these two ideas, *pareisis* and *aphesis* respectively. God did not forgive the sins of Old Testament saints finally until Jesus died on the cross. The blood of the animal sacrifices of Judaism only covered them temporarily. God did not exact a full penalty for sin until Jesus died. It is as though the Old Testament believers who offered the sacrifices for the expiation of sin that the Mosaic Law required paid for those sins with a credit card. God accepted those sacrifices as a temporary payment. However the bill came due later, and Jesus Christ paid that off entirely.

3:26 This verse explains the significance of Jesus Christ's death since the Cross. It demonstrates God's righteousness, the subject of Romans, by showing that God is both just in His dealings with sin and the Justifier who provides righteous standing for the sinner. Note that it is only those who have faith in Jesus who stand justified.

Verses 21-26 constitute an excellent explanation of God's imputation of righteousness to believing sinners by describing justification. These verses contain "God's great statement of justification by faith."¹⁰⁸ To summarize, God can declare sinners righteous because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for their sins by dying in their place. His death satisfied God's demands against sinners completely. Now God declares those who trust in Jesus Christ as their substitute righteous.

"Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross."¹⁰⁹

". . . the direct exposition of the righteousness by faith ends with the twenty-sixth verse. If the epistle had ended there it would not have been incomplete. All the rest is a consideration of objections [and, I might add, implications], in which the further unfolding of the righteousness is only incidental."¹¹⁰

The characteristics of justification are that it is apart from the Law (v. 21), through faith in Christ (v. 22a), for all people (vv. 22b-23), by grace (v. 24), at great cost to God (vv. 24b-25), and in perfect justice (v. 26).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Newell, p. 92.

¹⁰⁹Wiersbe, 1:522.

¹¹⁰Stifler, p. 67.

¹¹¹Wiersbe, 1:523-24.

B. THE DEFENSE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE 3:27-31

Having shown what justification is Paul went on to reaffirm that it is available only by faith. He proceeded to expound the great theological thesis of 3:21-26. Verses 27-31 state this theme, and chapter 4 elucidates and elaborates it.

3:27-28 There is no place for human boasting in this plan of salvation (cf. Eph. 2:8-9), though the Jews were inclined to boast because of their privileges (2:17, 23). The reason is that God's provision of salvation by faith springs from a different law than salvation by works does.

"One would think that the sinner would love to be forgiven at no cost. Unfortunately that is not the case. After all, sinners have their pride. They desperately want to claim some role in their own redemption."¹¹²

Salvation by works rests on keeping the Mosaic Law. This does not mean that the Mosaic Law required works for salvation but that those who hope to earn salvation by their works look to the Mosaic Law as what God requires. God's gift of salvation, however, rests on a different law (principle) that God has also ordained and revealed. This "law" is that salvation becomes ours by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is what God requires, not works.

". . . He *has* sent His Son, who *has* borne sin for you. You do not look to Christ to do something to save you: He *has done it* at the cross. You simply receive God's testimony as true, setting your seal thereto. (I often quote I Timothy 1.15 to inquiring sinners: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' In response to my question, they confess that 'came' is in the past tense. Then I say, 'How sad that you and I were not there, so that He might have saved us, for He has now gone back to heaven!' This shuts them up to contemplate the work Christ *finished when He was here*; upon which work, and God's Word concerning it, sinners must rest: *that is faith*.) You rest in God's Word regarding Christ and His work for you. You rest in Christ's shed blood."¹¹³

3:29-30 Paul continued to appeal to his Jewish audience in these verses as in the former two. If justification is by the Law, God must be the God of the Jews only since God only gave the Law to the Jews. Paul's point was that there are not two ways of salvation, one for the Jews by works and the

¹¹²Mounce, p. 38.

¹¹³Newell, p. 109.

other for Gentiles by faith. This is only logical, he reasoned, since there is only one God who is the God of all humankind. Paul probably used two separate prepositions in verse 30 ("by," *ek*, and "through," *dia*) simply for literary variety.¹¹⁴ His point was that there is only one method of obtaining God's righteousness.¹¹⁵

3:31 Paul was not saying that the Law is valueless.¹¹⁶ Even though he believed in salvation by faith he saw the Law as having an important function. Probably Paul meant that its function is to convict people of their inability to gain acceptance with God by their own works (vv. 19-20).¹¹⁷ The Law is not something God has given people to obey so they can obtain righteousness. Man's inability to save himself required the provision of a Savior from God. The Law in a sense made Jesus Christ's death necessary (vv. 24-25).

The point of verses 27-31 is that justification must come to all people by faith alone. Paul clarified here that this fact excludes boasting (vv. 27-28). It is also logical in view of the sovereignty of God (vv. 29-30), and it does not vitiate the Mosaic Law (v. 31).

C. THE PROOF OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH FROM THE LAW CH. 4

Paul's readers could have understood faith as being a new method of salvation since he contrasted faith with the law. He began this epistle by saying that the gospel reveals a righteousness from God implying something new (1:17). Was justification by faith a uniquely Christian revelation as contrasted with Jewish doctrine? No. In this chapter the apostle showed that God has always justified people by faith alone. In particular, he emphasized that God declared Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, righteous because of his faith. One of the present values of the Old Testament is that it shows that God justified people by faith in the past. If Paul could show from the Old Testament that Abraham received justification by faith, he could convince his Jewish readers that there is only one method of salvation (3:29-30).

". . . as in 3:27-31, Paul's purpose is not only to establish the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but also, indeed especially, to draw out the implications of this *sola fide* [faith alone]. To accomplish these purposes, Paul 'exposits' Gen. 15:6 . . . This text is quoted in v. 3 after Paul sets up his problem in terms of Abraham's 'right' to boast (vv. 1-2). Thereafter,

¹¹⁴Moo, p. 252.

¹¹⁵Harrison, p. 46.

¹¹⁶The absence of the definite article "the" before the first occurrence of "Law" in this verse in the Greek text does not indicate that Paul was only thinking of law in general, as the context makes clear.

¹¹⁷Another view is that Paul meant the Old Testament (law) testifies to justification by faith (Godet, pp. 166-67; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 2:346; Cranfield, 1:224; et al.). A third view is that faith provides the complete fulfillment of God's demands in His Law (Moo, pp. 254-55; et al.).

Paul quotes or alludes to this text in every paragraph of the chapter, using a series of antitheses to draw out its meaning and implications."¹¹⁸

1. Abraham's justification by faith 4:1-5

Paul began this chapter by showing that God declared Abraham righteous because of the patriarch's faith.

- 4:1 By referring to Abraham as "our forefather after the flesh" (v. 1) Paul revealed that he was aiming these comments at his Jewish readers primarily. Abraham's case is significant for Gentiles as well, however, because in another sense, as the father of the faithful, he is the father of "us all" (v. 16). "All" refers to all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.
- 4:2 This verse applies Paul's earlier statement about boasting (3:27) to Abraham's case for the sake of contrast. Abraham had no ground for boasting before God because he received justification by faith, not by works.
- 4:3 In Paul's day many of the rabbis taught that Abraham experienced justification because of his obedience rather than because of his faith.¹¹⁹ Consequently the apostle went back to Genesis 15:6 for his authority.

Exactly what Abraham believed is not clear in Genesis 15. The Hebrew conjunction *waw* used with a perfect tense verb, as in Genesis 15:6, indicates a break in the action. A good translation is, "Now Abraham had believed . . ." Abraham had obviously believed God previously (cf. Gen. 12:1-4, 7; 14:22-24). However now Abraham learned that he would receive an heir from his own body and innumerable descendants (Gen. 15:4). He believed this too. Exactly what Abraham believed is incidental to Paul's point, which was that he trusted God and specifically believed God's promise.

". . . Abraham just *believed* God: gave Him the honor of being a God of truth."¹²⁰

Trust in God's promise is what constitutes faith and results in justification. The promises of God vary. These promises constitute the content of faith. The object of faith does not vary, however. It is always the person of God. For us God's promise is that Jesus Christ died as our substitute and satisfied all of God's demands against sinners (3:24-25).

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 255.

¹¹⁹Harrison, p. 47; cf. 1 Macc. 2:51.

¹²⁰Newell, p. 139.

Note that God credited Abraham's faith to him as righteousness (v. 3). Faith itself is not righteousness. Faith is not meritorious in itself. It is only the vehicle by which God's righteousness reaches us. However, it is the only vehicle by which it reaches us.

4:4-5 Verses 4-5 contrast faith and works. Work yields wages that the person working deserves. Faith receives a gift (v. 4; lit. grace, Gr. *charin*) that the person believing does not deserve. Incredibly God justifies those who not only fail to deserve justification but deserve condemnation because they are "ungodly" (NASB) or "wicked" (NIV; v. 5; cf. 3:24). This is how far God's grace goes (cf. Deut. 25:1)!

In our day there are many subtle as well as obvious perversions of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Advocates of lordship salvation effectively add works to faith when they make commitment to Jesus Christ necessary for salvation. One astute writer has observed that this "front loading" of the gospel with works is "paving the road back to Rome."¹²¹ Some lordship salvation advocates believe that an unbeliever only has to be willing to submit to Christ's lordship. However this is only changing the human work from submitting to being willing to submit.

One lordship salvation advocate wrote that to exclude submission to Christ's lordship from the gospel message amounts to antinomianism.¹²² Later he defined antinomianism as follows.

*"antinomianism: the idea that behavior is unrelated to faith, or that Christians are not bound by any moral law. Antinomianism radically separates justification and sanctification, making practical holiness elective."*¹²³

Clearly this is not the position of most Christians who believe that faith alone is what God requires instead of faith plus commitment.¹²⁴

Another subtle modern form of works salvation often accompanies an incorrect interpretation of the biblical doctrine of perseverance. This view says that if a professing Christian does not continue in the faith and in holiness all his or her life, allowing for occasional lapses, he or she was not a true believer. This view "back loads" the gospel with works. Faithfulness to the Lord thus becomes a condition for salvation. This incorrect interpretation of perseverance usually goes hand in hand with lordship salvation.

¹²¹Earl Radmacher, "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 33:1 (March 1990):40.

¹²²John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 94.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 259, cf. pp. 94-98.

¹²⁴For a response to the Reformed claim that dispensationalists are antinomian (i.e., against law as a standard for Christian living), see Robert A Pyne, "Antinomianism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):141-54.

Some who hold these views try to get away from their connection with works by saying that it is God who produces submission and or sanctification in the believer, not the believer himself.¹²⁵ Nonetheless it is the professing Christian whom God holds responsible for his or her choices, not Himself.

"Indeed, every command to the believer implies the necessity of his involvement as part of the process [of sanctification]."¹²⁶

Another answer that some who hold these views give is that what the Bible affirms is that man cannot merit eternal life.¹²⁷ This is not the same, they say, as doing something necessary to obtain it such as submitting or remaining faithful. Yet the Bible uses the word "works," not just merit (vv. 2, 4, 5; Eph. 2:8-9).¹²⁸

2. David's testimony to justification by faith 4:6-8

Paul cited another eminent man in Jewish history whose words harmonized with the apostle's. Whereas Abraham lived before the Mosaic Law, David lived under it. Abraham's story is in the law section of the Hebrew Bible, and David's is in the prophets section. Here is the second witness Paul referred to in 3:21. Abraham represents the patriarchal period of Israel's history and David the monarchy period. As Israel's greatest king, one would assume that David would have been a strong advocate of the Mosaic Law. He was, but he did not view it as the key to justification.

The passage Paul quoted from David's writings (Ps. 32:1-2) does not state directly that David himself received justification by faith, though he did. It stresses that those to whom God "reckons" righteousness (i.e., the justified) are "blessed." Paul was carrying the sense of one passage (v. 6) over to explain the meaning of another (vv. 7-8). The second passage contained the same word (*logizesthai*, translated "reckons" or "credits" in v. 6, and translated "taken into account" or "count" in v. 8).

"One of the reasons why Paul quotes these verses is the presence in them of the key word 'reckon.' The practice of associating verses from the OT on the basis of verbal parallels was a common Jewish exegetical technique."¹²⁹

Psalm 32 is one of David's penitential psalms that he wrote after he had sinned greatly. Paul not only proved that David believed in imputed rather than earned righteousness

¹²⁵E.g., MacArthur, pp. 100-101.

¹²⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 152.

¹²⁷MacArthur, pp. 69, 105-21.

¹²⁸Three excellent books on salvation by faith alone, all of which respond to lordship salvation, are Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*; Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*; and Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*

¹²⁹Moo, p. 266.

with this quotation, but he also showed that when a believer sins his sin does not cancel his justification.

"Forgiveness is more than mere remitting of penalty. Even a hard-hearted judge might remit a man's fine if it were paid by someone else, but forgiveness involves the heart of the forgiver. God's forgiveness is the going forth of God's infinite tenderness toward the object of His mercy. It is God folding the sinner, as the returning prodigal was folded, to His bosom. Such a one is blessed indeed!"¹³⁰

". . . it is not the 'reckoning' of people's good works but God's act in *not* reckoning their sins against them that constitutes forgiveness."¹³¹

"God does keep a record of our works, so that He might reward us when Jesus comes; but He is not keeping a record of our sins."¹³²

3. The priority of faith to circumcision 4:9-12

The examples of Abraham and David, both Jews, led to the question Paul voiced in the next verse (v. 9). The apostle pointed out that when God declared Abraham righteous the patriarch was uncircumcised. He was a virtual Gentle. Fourteen years later Abraham underwent circumcision (Gen. 17:24-26). His circumcision was a sign (label) of what he already possessed. This point would have encouraged Paul's Jewish readers, who made so much of circumcision, to keep it in its proper place as secondary to faith. Paul used Abraham as more than an example of faith.

"As the recipient and mediator of the promise, his experience becomes paradigmatic for his spiritual progeny."¹³³

4. The priority of faith to the promise concerning headship of many nations 4:13-17

The Jews believed that they had a claim on Abraham that Gentiles did not have. Obviously he was the father of their nation, and this did place him in a unique relationship to his physical descendants. However, they incorrectly concluded that all the blessings that God had promised Abraham would come to them. Paul reminded his readers that part of God's promised blessing to Abraham was that he would be the father of many nations (v. 17). God had given him this promise after his justification (Gen. 17:4-6), and He repeated it to his descendants (Gen. 22:17-18).

¹³⁰Newell, p. 136.

¹³¹Moo, p. 266.

¹³²Wiersbe, 1:525.

¹³³Moo, p. 267.

- 4:13 God gave His promise to bless the Gentiles through Abraham long before He gave the Mosaic Law. Consequently it was wrong for the Jews to think that the blessing of the Gentiles depended on their obedience to the Law. It depended on God's faithfulness to His promise. God gave that promise to Abraham not because of his obedience but because of his faith. The giving of that promise even antedated Abraham's circumcision.
- 4:14 To introduce law-keeping as a condition for the fulfillment of this promise would have two effects. First, it would make faith irrelevant. It would subject this simple unconditional promise to the condition of human obedience. If, for example, a father promised his son a new bicycle, the boy would look forward to receiving it as a gift. However if the father added the condition that to get the bike the boy had to be obedient, he would destroy his son's confidence that he would get the bike. Now obtaining the bicycle depended on obedience. It was no longer a matter of faith. The second effect, which is also evident in this illustration, is that the promise would be nullified (i.e., made worthless).
- 4:15 Rather than bringing blessing, which God promised Abraham, the Law brings wrath because no one can keep the Law perfectly. Whenever there is failure, wrath follows. However without law there can be no violation and therefore no wrath.
- "Violation of law turns 'sin' into the more serious offense of
'transgression,' meriting God's wrath
God gave the law to the Jews
The Jews have transgressed the law (cf. 2:1-29; 3:9-19)
The law brought wrath to the Jews . . .
- "Paul, then, 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."¹³⁴
- 4:16 This verse summarizes the thought of verses 13-15. God gave His promise to make Abraham the father of many nations (v. 13) unconditionally ("in accordance with grace") after the patriarch stood justified. Abraham obtained the promise simply by believing it (i.e., by faith), not by keeping the law. This is the only way that the realization of what God had promised could be certain. This part of Paul's argument therefore further exalts faith as the only method of justification.¹³⁵

¹³⁴Ibid., pp. 276, 277.

¹³⁵See Robert A. Pyne, "The 'Seed,' the Spirit, and the Blessing of Abraham," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):216-17.

"Faith is helplessness reaching out in total dependence upon God."¹³⁶

4:17 Paul described God as He did here in harmony with the promise he cited. God gave the ability to father many nations to Abraham when he was already dead regarding his reproductive powers. God summoned yet uncreated nations as He had summoned the yet uncreated cosmos, namely with a word, in this case a promise (cf. Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5).¹³⁷

5. The exemplary value of Abraham's faith 4:18-22

Paul concluded his proof that faith was the only method of justification before the Cross by showing that what Abraham did in trusting God is essentially what everyone must do.

4:18 Abraham's hope rested solely on God's promise. He had no hope of obtaining descendants naturally. His faith was not a condition for the reception of the promise, but he believed with the intention of receiving it.¹³⁸

4:19-21 Even though Abraham's faith was stronger at some times than it was at others (cf. Gen. 17:17, 23-27), Paul could say he was not weak in faith (v. 19).

"When Paul says that Abraham did not 'doubt . . . because of unbelief,' he means not that Abraham never had momentary hesitations, but that he avoided a deep-seated and permanent attitude of distrust and inconsistency in relationship to God and his promises [cf. James. 1:6-8]."¹³⁹

The patriarch believed God in the face of discouraging facts that he contemplated courageously. He believed despite the knowledge that what God had promised could not happen naturally. Abraham grew stronger in faith as time passed. The record of his life in Genesis shows this (v. 20). He gave glory to God by believing Him.

4:22 This verse brings Paul's argument concerning Abraham's justification to a climax. The apostle had proved the point he set out to demonstrate, and he restated Genesis 15:6 as a conclusion (cf. v. 4).

"The spiritual attitude of a man, who is conscious that in himself he has no strength, and no hope of a future, and

¹³⁶Mounce, p. 127.

¹³⁷Cranfield, 1:246. Another view is that God named or addressed these uncreated nations even though they did not yet exist. The interpretation hinges on the meaning of "calls," which is not clear.

¹³⁸Godet, p. 181.

¹³⁹Moo, pp. 284-85.

who nevertheless casts himself upon, and lives by, the word of God which assures him of a future, is the necessarily and eternally right attitude of all souls to God. He whose attitude it is, is at bottom right with God."¹⁴⁰

6. Conclusions from Abraham's example 4:23-25

4:23-24 Paul applied God's dealings with Abraham to his readers in this pericope's final verses. God will credit His righteousness to all who believe Him. As in verse 3, the content of faith is not specific (v. 24). The more important point is that we trust God as Abraham did. Our confidence must be in Him. Paul was not saying here that we need to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. That is important, as he says elsewhere (1 Cor. 15), not as a condition for salvation but because it is a fact of history.¹⁴¹ Paul intended his mention of God raising Jesus here to help the reader remember that He is the same God who brings life out of death as the God whom Abraham believed. It may be easier for us to believe than it was for Abraham because we look back on a resurrection completed whereas Abraham looked forward to one anticipated.

4:25 What did Paul mean when he spoke of the death and resurrection of Jesus? The NIV interprets the Greek proposition *dia*, which occurs twice in this verse, as "for," implying a prospective sense. The NASB translates it as having a retrospective sense: "because of." The retrospective sense is its usual significance rather than the rarer prospective sense, which we could render "with a view to." "Because of" is probably a clearer translation in view of the normal retrospective use of *dia*, its use in parallel statements here, and since it makes good sense here. Paul evidently meant Jesus underwent crucifixion because of our transgressions of God's law (cf. Isa. 53:11-12), and He experienced resurrection with a view to our justification. In other words, it seems best to understand the preposition in a retrospective sense in the first line and in a prospective sense in the second line.¹⁴² God is the implied agent of the action (cf. 3:25; Isa. 53:12).

"Christ being raised up, God announces to me, 'Not only were your sins put away by Christ's blood, so that you are justified *from* all things; but I have also raised up Christ; and you shall have your standing *in Him*. I have given you this faith in a Risen Christ, and announce to you that in Him alone now is your place and standing. Judgment is forever past for you, both as concerns your sin, and as concerns My demand that you have a standing of holiness

¹⁴⁰James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2:621.

¹⁴¹The resurrection was not part of the saving work of Christ but was the consequence of it. Having paid the debt of man's sin death had no claim on Him because He had not sinned Himself (cf. 6:23).

¹⁴²See Moo, pp. 288-89; Cranfield, 1:252.

and righteousness of your own before Me. All this is past. *Christ* is now your standing! He is your life and your righteousness; and you need nothing of your own forever. I made Christ to become sin on your behalf, identified Him with all that you were, in order that you might become the righteousness of God in Him."¹⁴³

"God's entire redemptive plan is summarized in this final verse of chap. 4."¹⁴⁴

Chapter 4 is a unit within Paul's exposition of how God imputes His righteousness to sinners (3:21—5:21). It serves to show that justification has always come because of faith toward God and not because the sinner obeyed God's law. This was true before Jesus Christ died as well as after. Faith is the only way by which anyone has ever received justification from God. Paul's emphasis was on faith as the method of obtaining righteousness, not on the content of faith.

D THE BENEFITS OF JUSTIFICATION 5:1-11

Paul's original readers would have had another question because of what he had written in chapters 1—4. Is this method of justification safe? Since it is by faith, it seems quite unsure. Paul next gave evidence that this method is reliable by explaining the results of justification by faith.¹⁴⁵

"In the first eleven verses we have the blessed results of justification by faith, along with the most comprehensive statement in the Bible of the pure love and grace of God, in giving Christ for us sinners."¹⁴⁶

5:1 "Therefore" signals that what follows rests on what has preceded. Paul now put the question of whether justification is by faith or by works behind him. He had proved that it comes to us by faith.

"We must note at once that the Greek form of this verb 'declared righteous,' or 'justified,' is not the present participle, '*being* declared righteous,' but rather the aorist participle, '*having been* declared righteous,' or 'justified.' You say, What is the difference? The answer is, 'being declared righteous' looks to a state you are in; 'having been declared righteous' looks back to *a fact that happened*."

¹⁴³Newell, pp. 157-58. His review of what justification is and is not (pp. 159-61) is also helpful.

¹⁴⁴Mounce, p. 131.

¹⁴⁵Moo, pp. 290-95, argued that chapter 5 belongs with chapters 6—8 more than with 3:21—4:25. He noted a chiasmic structure in chapters 5—8 and believed the theme of this section is assurance of glory. Most scholars, however, have felt that the major break in Paul's thought occurs after chapter 5 rather than before it.

¹⁴⁶Newell, p. 162.

'Being in a justified *state*' of course is incorrect, confusing, as it does, justification and sanctification."¹⁴⁷

The first of the blessings "that came spilling out of the cornucopia of justification"¹⁴⁸ is peace (cf. 1:7; 2:10). However this is peace *with* God (i.e., reconciliation), not just a subjective feeling of tranquillity that is the peace *of* God (Phil. 4:7). Paul had been speaking of God's wrath being poured out on sinners (1:18). Those who stand justified need not fear God's wrath since Jesus Christ has made peace between them and God by His death (cf. Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:14). Note that references to peace and reconciliation frame this pericope (vv. 1, 11).

"Our peace with God is not as between two nations before at war; but as between a king and rebellious and guilty subjects."¹⁴⁹

"It is well known that Romans lacks any extended christological discussion per se, but Paul's repeated insistence in these chapters [5—8] that all the believer experiences of God's blessings comes only through Christ develops a very significant christological focus in its own right. Christology, we might say, is not the topic of any part of Rom. 5—8, but it is the basis for everything in these chapters."¹⁵⁰

5:2 The second benefit is access (Gr. *prosagoge*). The idea here is that Jesus Christ enables us to enjoy continuing relationship with God (cf. Eph. 2:17-18; 3:12). Paul spoke of "this grace in which we stand" as the realm into which Christ's redeeming work transfers us. He stressed the fact that our being in this state is an act of God's grace. Our present position in relation to God is all grace, and our justification admits us to that position.

The last part of the verse focuses on that part of our reconciliation that we can look forward to with joyful confidence. Paul had in view the glory that we will experience when we stand in the Lord's presence.

5:3-4 The third benefit of justification is joy in sufferings. Peace with God does not always result in peace with other people. Nevertheless the fact that we have peace with God and a relationship with Him with hope of standing before Him acceptable enables us to view present difficulties with joy. We can rejoice in tribulations because God has revealed that He uses them to

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁴⁸Harrison, p. 55.

¹⁴⁹Newell, p. 165.

¹⁵⁰Moo, p. 300.

produce steadfast endurance and proven character in those who relate to their sufferings properly (cf. Job 23:10; James 1; Heb. 12).

"Our English word 'tribulation' comes from a Latin word *tribulum*. In Paul's day, a *tribulum* was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing the grain. The *tribulum* was drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff."¹⁵¹

"The newborn child of God is precious in His sight, but the tested and proven saint means even more to Him because such a one is a living demonstration of the character-developing power of the gospel. When we stand in the presence of God, all material possessions will have been left behind, but all that we have gained by way of spiritual advance will be retained."¹⁵²

This quotation helps us see how character produces hope. Hope of glorifying God with our characters when we see Him is in view. Our progress in character development will then testify to God's grace in our lives.

5:5 This hope, the focal point of this pericope, will not suffer disappointment because God loves us and enables us to withstand tribulations. He does this by His Holy Spirit whom He has given to indwell every justified sinner living during and after the time Paul wrote (cf. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:9). Paul developed the Holy Spirit's ministry to the believer later (ch. 8). The fourth benefit of justification therefore is the indwelling Holy Spirit. Note the progression in these verses from faith (v. 1) to hope (vv. 2-5) to love (v. 5; cf. 1 Cor. 13:13).

"The confidence we have for the day of judgment is not based only on our intellectual recognition of the fact of God's love, or even only on the demonstration of God's love on the cross (although that is important; cf. vv. 6-8), but also on the inner, subjective certainty that God does love us."¹⁵³

5:6 The depth of God's love (v. 5) becomes clearer in this verse and those that follow (vv. 6-10). Four terms that are increasingly uncomplimentary describe those for whom Christ died. The first is "helpless" or "powerless." The idea expressed by the Greek word (*asthenon*) is that we

¹⁵¹Wiersbe, 1:527.

¹⁵²Harrison, p. 57.

¹⁵³Moo, p. 304.

were "incapable of working out any righteousness for ourselves."¹⁵⁴ At that very time Christ died for us.

"At the right time" refers to the fullness of time, the right time from God's perspective (cf. 3:26; 8:18; 13:11; Gal. 4:4). The second term is "ungodly," a strong pejorative term in Paul (cf. 1:18; 4:5). Even though some people who are lost seek the things of God, everyone neglects God and rebels against God. This is ungodliness.

5:7 This verse prepares for the next one that contrasts with it. Paul used "righteous" here in the general sense of an upright person, not in the theological sense of a person made right with God. People appreciate a good person more than an upright person. Goodness carries the idea of one who is not only upright but loved for it because he or she reaches out to help others.¹⁵⁵

5:8 The third term used to describe those for whom Christ died is "sinners" ("wicked"; cf. 3:23), neither righteous nor good. Paul here was contrasting the worth of the life laid down, Jesus Christ's, and the unworthiness of those who benefit from His sacrifice. Whereas people may look at one another as meriting love because they are righteous or good, God views them as sinners. Nevertheless God loves them. His provision of His own Son as our Savior demonstrated the depth of His love (John 3:16).

The preposition in the clause "Christ died for (*huper*) sin" stresses the substitute character of His sacrifice. It also highlights the fact that God in His love for us provided that sacrifice for our welfare.

5:9 So far Paul had referred to four benefits of justification. These blessings were peace with God (v. 1), access into a gracious realm (v. 2), joy in tribulations (vv. 3-5a), and the indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 5b). Still there is "much more" (cf. vv. 10, 15, 17, 20). What Paul next described are benefits that justified sinners will experience in the future. The first of these is deliverance from the outpouring of God's wrath on the unrighteous (cf. 1:18). Jesus Christ's blood is the symbol of His death and the literal expression of His life poured out as a sacrifice (cf. 3:25). Having done the harder thing, namely justifying us when we were yet sinners (v. 8), how much more will He do the easier thing, namely delivering us from coming wrath.

5:10 The fourth and worst term used to describe those for whom Christ died is "enemies." People are not only helpless to save themselves (v. 6), neglectful of God (v. 6), and wicked (v. 8), but they also set themselves

¹⁵⁴Sanday and Headlam, p. 127.

¹⁵⁵J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 286-87.

against God and His purposes. Even though many unsaved people profess to love God, God who knows their hearts sees opposition to Himself in them. Their antagonism toward Him is the proof of it.

Jesus Christ's death reconciled us to God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18). The Scriptures always speak of man as reconciled to God. They never speak of God as reconciled to man.¹⁵⁶ Man has offended and departed from God and needs reconciliation into relationship with Him. It is man who has turned from God, not God who has turned from man.¹⁵⁷ There are two aspects of reconciliation: one for all mankind (2 Cor. 5:19), and another for the believer (2 Cor. 5:20). Jesus Christ's death put mankind in a savable condition, but people still need to experience full reconciliation with God by believing in His Son.

Jesus Christ's death is responsible for our justification. His continuing life is responsible for our progressive sanctification and our glorification. Having done the harder thing for us, delivering Christ to death to reconcile us to Himself, God will certainly do the easier thing. He will see that we share Christ's risen life forever.

We experience continuing salvation (sanctification) and ultimate salvation (glorification) because of Jesus Christ's ongoing life. These present and future aspects of our salvation were not the direct results of His death, but they are the consequences of His life after death and resurrection (cf. 6:8-13). We have salvation in the present and in the future because our Savior lives. He is still saving us. This verse shows that we are eternally secure.

5:11 Jesus Christ's death reconciled us to God with the effect that one day in the future we will stand before Him complete (cf. vv. 5-10). However we also enter into the benefits of that reconciliation now (cf. vv. 1-4). "This" probably refers to our future salvation, the closest antecedent.

In this section we have observed the following benefits of justification by faith.

1. Peace with God (v. 1)
2. Access into the grace of God (v. 2)
3. Joy in tribulation (vv. 3-5a)
4. The indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 5b)
5. Deliverance from future condemnation (v. 9)
6. Present continuing salvation (v. 10)
7. Union with God (v. 11)

¹⁵⁶God *reconciles* people to Himself, He *redeems* them from *sin*, and He *propitiates Himself* all through the death of His Son.

¹⁵⁷See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:91-93.

This section of the argument of the book should help any reader realize that justification by faith is a safe method. It is the doorway to manifold blessings that obedience to the Law could never guarantee.

"Totally apart from Law, and purely by grace, we have a salvation that takes care of the past, the present, and the future. Christ died for us; Christ lives for us; Christ is coming for us! Hallelujah, what a Savior!"¹⁵⁸

E. THE UNIVERSAL APPLICABILITY OF JUSTIFICATION 5:12-21

Paul's final argument in support of justification by faith was a development of his previous emphasis on the solidarity that the saved experience with their Savior (5:1-2, 9-10). In this section (5:12-21) he expanded that idea by showing that just as Adam's sin has affected all people, so Jesus Christ's obedience has affected all believers.

"As Adam's one sin never fails to bring death, so Christ's one righteous act in behalf of sinners never fails to being the opposite award to those who are in Him."¹⁵⁹

The apostle viewed Adam and Christ as federal heads of two groups of people. A federal head is a person who acts as the representative of many others and whose actions result in consequences that the individuals he represents inevitably experience. Examples of federal heads include a king, a president, a member of congress, and a parent, among others. In this section Paul was not looking at what individual sinners have done, which had been his interest previously. Rather he looked at the one trespass of Adam, namely the Fall, and the one righteous act of Jesus Christ, namely His death, and their consequences for those affected by their acts. Adam's act made all of his descendants sinners. We are sinners not only because we commit acts of sin but also because Adam's sin corrupted the human race and made sinning inevitable for his descendants. Christ's act made all who trust in Him righteous apart from their own works.

"The power of Christ's act of obedience to overcome Adam's act of disobedience is the great theme of this paragraph. . . .

"The main connection is with the teaching of assurance of final salvation in the immediately preceding paragraph (vv. 2b, 9-10). The passage shows why those who have been justified and reconciled can be so certain that they will be saved from wrath and share in 'the glory of God': it is because Christ's act of obedience ensures eternal life for all those who are 'in Christ.'"¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸Wiersbe, 1:528.

¹⁵⁹Stifler, p. 95.

¹⁶⁰Moo, pp. 315, 316.

5:12 Paul did not call Adam and Christ by name when he first spoke of them but referred to each as "one man."¹⁶¹ He thereby stressed the unity of the federal head with those under his authority who are also "men" (i.e., people).

We might interpret this verse as meaning that Adam only set a bad example for mankind that everyone has followed if we did not continue reading. Adam's sin had a more direct and powerful effect than that of a bad example (v. 15).

Paul personified sin presenting it as an evil power. He probably meant both physical and spiritual death.

Why did Paul and God hold Adam responsible for the sinfulness of the race when it was really Eve who sinned first? They did so because Adam was the person in authority over and therefore responsible for Eve (Gen. 2:18-23).

Paul compared the manner in which death entered the world, through sin, and the manner in which it spread to everyone, also through sin. Death is universal because sin is universal. Paul's concern was more with original death than with original sin.

"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."¹⁶²

5:13-14 Paul did not carry through the comparison begun in verse 12 here. If he had it would have been "so righteousness entered the world by one man and life through righteousness." Evidently Paul broke off his statement because he wanted to develop the case of Adam. Verses 13-14 explain verse 12. He returned to the thought begun in verse 12 in verse 18.

The point of these verses is that people died physically before God gave the Mosaic Law. If there is no law, there can be no transgression (cf. 3:20). Since death is the penalty for sin, why did those people die? The answer is they died because of Adam's sin. The corporate sinning of all people "in" Adam accounts for the universality of death.

The idea that people should involuntarily suffer punishment because of the sins of another is repugnant to us. Nevertheless as the head of the human race, Adam's actions resulted in consequences that his descendants had to

¹⁶¹The key word "one" occurs 14 times in verses 12-21.

¹⁶²Moo, p. 325.

bear. Likewise any representative leader's decisions result in consequences his followers must bear. For example, when our president decides to sign into law some piece of legislation it becomes binding on everyone under his authority. Similarly we all bear physical characteristics that are the product of our parents' action of producing a child. It is just one of the facts of life that we all suffer the consequences of the decisions of those who have preceded us and are over us (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). Some of those consequences are good for us and others are bad for us. We have all been born sinners because of Adam's sin. Some people rebel against God because of this. However, God has promised not to reckon our sins to us if we will trust in His Son (2 Cor. 5:19). He has provided a way to secure pardon.

"Romans Five does not talk of a nature of sin received by us from Adam, but of our being *made guilty* by his act. We were so connected with the first Adam that we did not have to wait to be born, or to have a sinful nature; but when Adam, our representative, acted, we acted. . . .

"Every little white coffin,—yea, every coffin, should remind us of the universal effect of that sin of Adam, for it was thus and thus only that 'death passed to all men.'"¹⁶³

Adam was a "type" or "pattern" (Gr. *tupos*) of one who would follow him, namely Jesus Christ. Adam's act had universal impact and prefigured Christ's act, which also has universal impact. The point of similarity between Adam and Christ is that what each did affected many others. Each communicated what belonged to him to those he represented.

"Adam came from the earth, but Jesus is the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). Adam was tested in a Garden, surrounded by beauty and love; Jesus was tempted in a wilderness, and He died on a cruel cross surrounded by hatred and ugliness. Adam was a thief, and was cast out of Paradise; but Jesus Christ turned to a thief and said, 'Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). The Old Testament is 'the book of the generations of Adam' (Gen. 5:1) and it ends with 'a curse' (Mal. 4:6). The New Testament is 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ' (Matt. 1:1) and it ends with 'no more curse' (Rev. 22:3)."¹⁶⁴

5:15-17 The effect of Jesus Christ's act on people was totally different from that of Adam's and vastly superior to it, as "much more" indicates. "Much more" here shows that Jesus Christ did not just cancel the effects of Adam's sin, but he provided more than Adam lost or even possessed, namely the

¹⁶³Newell, pp. 179, 183.

¹⁶⁴Wiersbe, 1:530.

righteousness of God! Paul probably used the phrase "the many" to highlight the importance of Adam and Christ who were individuals (cf. Isa. 53:11-12; Mark 10:45). In the case of Adam, "the many" means all people, but in the case of Christ, "the many" means all who receive the benefit of His act, all believers.

In Adam's case a single sin by a single individual was sufficient to bring condemnation to the whole human race. In Christ's case one act of obedience, which the transgressions of many people made necessary, was sufficient to bring justification to all those who believe in Him (v. 16).

The consequence of Adam's sin was death reigning over mankind. The consequence of Christ's obedience was mankind reigning over death (v. 17). This implies the believer's resurrection and participation in Jesus Christ's reign as well as our reigning in this life.

5:18-19 These verses summarize Paul's point, as indicated by "So then" or "Consequently." They also complete the thought that Paul broke off at the end of verse 12. "Transgression" or "trespass" (cf. vv. 15, 16, 17) highlights the deliberate disobedience of Adam (v. 19; cf. Gen. 2:17). Many will become righteous (v. 19) both forensically (justified), as they believe, and practically (glorified). "The many" here, of course, means the justified.¹⁶⁵ The obedience of Christ is a reference to His death as the ultimate act of obedience rather than to His life of obedience since it is His death that saves us.

"There is no more direct statement in Scripture concerning justification than we find in verse 19 . . ." ¹⁶⁶

5:20-21 One of the purposes of the Mosaic Law was to increase the sinfulness of people. It did so at least by exposing behavior that was until then not obviously contrary to God's will. God did this to prove man's sinfulness to him.

"The fact and power of 'sin' introduced into the world by Adam has not been decreased by the law, but given a new dimension as rebellion against the revealed, detailed will of God; sin has become 'transgression' . . . [cf. 7:13; Gal. 3:19]" ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Obviously these verses do not mean that everyone will be justified.

¹⁶⁶Newell, p. 178.

¹⁶⁷Moo, p. 348.

However when God provided Jesus Christ, He provided grace (favor) that far exceeded the sin that He exposed when He provided the Law. We could translate "abounded" or "increased" (v. 20) "superabounded."

"The apostle waxes almost ecstatic as he revels in the superlative excellence of the divine overruling that makes sin serve a gracious purpose."¹⁶⁸

Verse 21 is the grand conclusion of the argument in this pericope (5:12-21). It brings together the main concepts of sin and death, and righteousness and life. Effectively Paul played down Adam and exalted Jesus Christ.

"Paul often thinks in terms of 'spheres' or 'dominions,' and the language of 'reigning' is particularly well suited to this idea. Death has its own dominion: humanity as determined, and dominated, by Adam. And in this dominion, sin is in control. But those who 'receive the gift' (v. 17) enjoy a transfer from this domain to another, the domain of righteousness, in which grace reigns and where life is the eventual outcome."¹⁶⁹

CONTRASTS IN ROMANS 5:12-21¹⁷⁰		
Two men	Adam (v. 14)	Christ (v. 14)
Two acts	One trespass in the garden (vv. 12, 15, 17, 18, 19)	One righteous act on the cross (v. 18)
Two results	Condemnation, guilt, and death (vv. 15, 16, 18, 19)	Justification, life, and kingship (vv. 17, 18, 19)
Two differences		
In degree (v. 15)	Sin abounds	Grace superabounds
In operation (v. 16)	One sin by Adam resulting in condemnation and the reign of death for everyone	Many sins on Christ resulting in justification and reigning in life for believers

¹⁶⁸Harrison, p. 65.

¹⁶⁹Moo, p. 350.

¹⁷⁰Adapted from Newell, p. 176.

CONTRASTS IN ROMANS 5:12-21¹⁷⁰

Two kings	Sin reigning through death (v. 17)	Grace reigning through righteousness (v. 21)
Two abundances		Of grace (v. 17) Of the gift of righteousness (v. 17)
Two contrasting states	Condemned people slaves of sin by Adam	Justified people reigning in life by Christ

This section (5:12-21) shows that mankind is guilty before God because all of Adam's descendants are sinners by virtue of Adam's sin. Earlier Paul wrote that we are all guilty because we have all committed acts of sin (chs. 3—4). Jesus Christ's death has removed both causes for condemnation righteously, guilt for personal sins and guilt for original sin. This section helps us understand our union with Christ that Paul explained further in chapter 6.

IV. THE IMPARTATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS CHS. 6—8

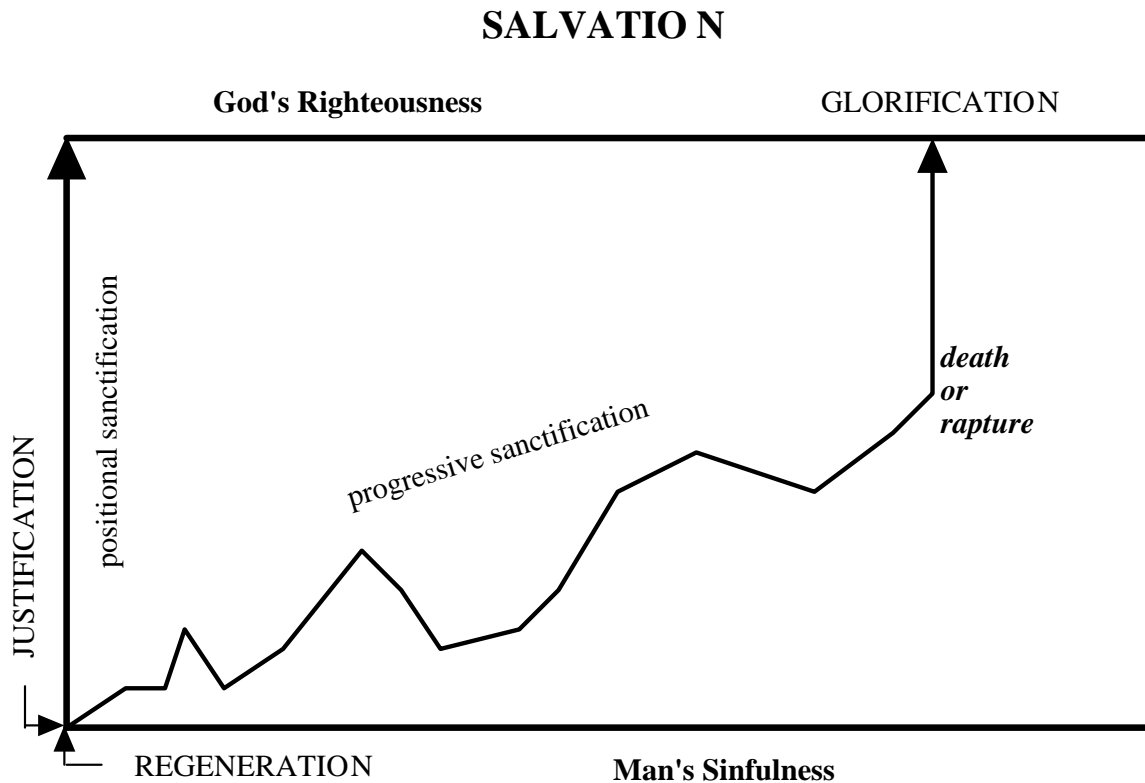
The apostle moved on from questions about why people need salvation (1:18—3:20), what God has done to provide it, and how we can appropriate it (3:21—5:21). He next explained that salvation involves more than a right standing before God, which justification affords. God also provides salvation from the present power of sin in the redeemed sinner's daily experience. This is progressive sanctification (chs. 6—8).

When a sinner experiences redemption—"converted" is the subjective term—he or she simultaneously experiences justification. Justification imparts God's righteousness to him or her. Justification is the same thing as "positional sanctification." This term means that God views the believer as completely holy in his or her standing before God. That person is no longer guilty because of his or her sins (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11).

However when a sinner experiences redemption, he or she also begins a process of sanctification. This process of becoming progressively more righteous (holy) in his or her experience is not automatic. It involves growth and requires the believer to cooperate with God to produce holiness in daily life. God leads the believer and provides the enablement for him or her to follow, but the believer must choose to follow and make use of the resources for sanctification that God provides.¹⁷¹ This progressive sanctification will end at death or the Rapture, whichever occurs first. Then the believer will experience glorification. Then his experiential condition will finally conform to his legal standing

¹⁷¹See Ryrie, *So Great . . .*, pp. 152-54.

before God. He or she will then *be* completely righteous as well as having been *declared* righteous. God will remove our sinful nature and will conform our lives fully to His will (8:29).



In chapters 6—8 Paul explained how justified sinners can become more holy (godly, righteous) in daily living before our glorification. We need to understand our relationship as believers to sin (i.e., victory, ch. 6), to the Law (i.e., liberty, ch. 7), and to God (i.e., security, ch. 8) to attain that worthy goal.

A. THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO SIN CH. 6

"Subduing the power of sin is the topic of Rom. 6."¹⁷²

1. Freedom from sin 6:1-14

Paul began his explanation of the believer's relationship to sin by expounding the implications of our union with Christ (6:1-14). He had already spoken of this in 5:12-21 regarding justification, but now he showed how that union affects our progressive sanctification.

¹⁷²Moo, p. 350.

"The focus of his discussion, particularly in chapter 6, is not on how to obey God and avoid sinning, but on why we should obey God."¹⁷³

The apostle referred to Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in this section. Seen from the viewpoint of His substitute sacrifice these events did not involve the believer's participation. Jesus Christ alone endured the cross, experienced burial, and rose from the grave. Nevertheless His work of redemption was not only substitutionary but also representative (5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:14). It is in this respect that Paul described believers as identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection in the following verses. (Paul had already introduced the idea of Christ as our representative in 5:12-21.) Sin has no further claim on Christ because He paid the penalty for sin. Sin no longer has a claim on us because He died as our representative. We are free from sin's domination because of our union with Him. This was Paul's line of thought.

6:1 Paul had just said that grace super-abounded where sin increased (5:20). Perhaps then believers should not worry about practicing sin since it results in the manifestation of more of God's grace and His greater glory.¹⁷⁴ One expression of this is Voltaire's famous statement, "God will forgive; that is his 'business.'"¹⁷⁵ W. H. Auden voiced similar sentiments.

"I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged."¹⁷⁶

Paul probably posed the question to draw out the implications of God's grace.

". . . justification by faith is not simply a legal matter between me and God; it is a living relationship."¹⁷⁷

6:2 This is definitely not a proper conclusion (cf. 3:8). It is illogical that those who have died in relation to sin should continue to live in sin. Paul personified sin and described it as have a ruling power or realm. We died to sin when we experienced conversion.

"How despicable it would be for a son or a daughter to consider himself or herself free to sin, because he or she knew that a father or a mother would forgive."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³Robert A. Pyne, "Dependence and Duty: The Spiritual Life in Galatians 5 and Romans 6," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 149.

¹⁷⁴B. Kaye, *The Argument of Romans with Special Reference to Chapter 6*, p. 14, found 74 rhetorical questions in Romans.

¹⁷⁵Cited by Moo, p. 356.

¹⁷⁶W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being*, p. 116.

¹⁷⁷Wiersbe, 1:531.

¹⁷⁸William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 86.

Note that Paul did not say that it is impossible to live in sin or that sin is dead to the Christian (i.e., that it no longer appeals to us). He meant it is unnecessary and undesirable to live in sin, to habitually practice it.

For example, if a man's wife died it would be unrealistic for him to continue living as though she were alive. Her death changed his relationship to her. He could, of course, continue to live as though she were alive, but such a man no longer must do so.

It is incredible that one advocate of lordship salvation wrote the following.

"What is no-lordship theology but the teaching that those who have died to sin can indeed live in it?"¹⁷⁹

Romans 6:13 and 12:1-2 are three of the clearest verses in the Bible that submission to the lordship of Christ is the duty of every Christian. It is not optional or unimportant, but it is a command addressed to Christians, not unbelievers.

6:3-4

Our baptism into Jesus Christ resulted in our death to sin.

"It appears that Paul had both the literal and figurative in mind in this paragraph, for he used the readers' experience of water baptism to remind them of their identification with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit."¹⁸⁰

"Baptism . . . functions as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole."¹⁸¹

Water baptism for the early Christians was an initiation into Christian existence. Baptism joins the believer with Jesus Christ in public profession which includes joining him or her with Christ in His death. Union with Christ in baptism then necessitates our burial and resurrection with Him.

". . . there is no evidence in Rom. 6, or in the NT elsewhere, that the actual physical movements—immersion and emersion—involved in baptism were accorded symbolical significance. The focus in Rom. 6, certainly, is not on the *ritual* of baptism, but the simple *event* of baptism. . . .

¹⁷⁹MacArthur, p. 106. MacArthur has caricatured those of us who believe in salvation by faith alone as "no-lordship" advocates implying that we do not believe in the lordship of Christ. We do believe in it, but we do not believe that submitting to Jesus Christ's mastery over every area of our lives, or even being willing to do so, is a biblical condition for obtaining justification (cf. 6:23; John 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9; et al.).

¹⁸⁰Wiersbe, 1:531.

¹⁸¹Moo, p. 355.

"Burial with Christ' is a description of the participation of the believer in Christ's own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism."¹⁸²

"It is not that the believer in baptism is laid in his own grave, but that through that action he is set alongside Christ Jesus in *his*."¹⁸³

". . . baptism is introduced not to explain *how* we were buried with Christ but to demonstrate *that* we were buried with Christ."¹⁸⁴

Jesus' burial was not part of His saving work. It simply proved that He had died (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Similarly His resurrection was not part of His saving work. It proved that death could not hold Him because He was sinless (cf. Acts 2:24).

God not only raised Jesus Christ but also imparts new life to believers. Walking in newness of life shows that the believer has received new life (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

"Glory" in verse 4 has power in view (cf. John 11:40).

6:5 In view of what follows Paul apparently meant physical resurrection. He was speaking of the resurrection of the body at a future date rather than the believer's resurrection to a new type of life with Christ (cf. Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12; 3:1). This is parallel to what he said about our death in the context.

We could paraphrase "united" as "fused together." The Greek word (*sumphytoi*) means "grown together." Our union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the basis for our future resurrection.

6:6 As we sinned in Adam, so we died with Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20). Paul said it is important that we "know" this because it is crucial to understanding our relationship to sin as believers.

"Christian living depends on Christian learning; duty is always founded on doctrine. If Satan can keep a Christian ignorant, he can keep him impotent."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸²Ibid., pp. 362, 363.

¹⁸³G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 130.

¹⁸⁴Moo, p. 364. He wrote an excursus on Paul's "with Christ" conception, pp. 391-95.

¹⁸⁵Wiersbe, 1:530.

"Satan's great device is to drive earnest souls back to beseeching God for what God says has already been done!"¹⁸⁶

Our old "man" or "self" refers to the person we were before we experienced justification. That person was crucified with Christ (cf. Col. 3:9). That person is now dead. Nevertheless we can adopt his or her old characteristics if we choose to do so (cf. Eph. 4:22). The believer is not the same person he or she used to be before justification (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

The old man (old self) is not the same as the old nature.¹⁸⁷ The old nature refers to our sinful human nature that every human being possesses as long as he or she lives. The old nature is the same as the flesh (cf. 7:5).

"The flesh,' which is sin entrenched in the body, is unchangeably evil, and will war against us till Christ comes. Only the Holy Spirit has power over 'the flesh' (Chapter 8.1)."¹⁸⁸

Even though the old man has died, the old nature lives on. I am not the same person I was before justification because sin no longer can dominate me, but I still have a sinful human nature.¹⁸⁹

"What we *were* 'in Adam' is no more; but, until heaven, the temptation to *live* in Adam always remains."¹⁹⁰

Our "body of sin" is not the same as a sinful body since the body itself is not sinful (cf. Mark 7:21-23). Probably the body in this expression represents the whole person (cf. vv. 12-13). We express our sinfulness through our bodies. The result of our crucifixion with Christ was that the body no longer needs to be an instrument that we use to sin since we are no longer slaves to sin.

6:7 Death ends all claims. Paul illustrated his point in verse 6 by referring to this general truth. Once a person has died he or she has no more earthly obligations. Because of our death with Christ we have no obligation to

¹⁸⁶Newell, p. 213.

¹⁸⁷See John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5—8*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁸Newell, p. 212.

¹⁸⁹I prefer not to use the term "new nature." It does not appear in Scripture. The New Testament presents the Christian not as a person with two natures warring within him or her. It presents the Christian as a person with one sinful nature (the flesh) that is in conflict with the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16-23). It also speaks of the Christian as struggling with the decision to live as the new man that he or she now is. Our alternative is to live as the old man who we were but are no longer (cf. Rom. 7:13-24).

¹⁹⁰Moo, p. 375.

respond to the dictates of our sinful nature. We may choose to do so, but we do not have to do so, and we should not do so (cf. Eph. 4:22-32).

This verse does not mean that the power of sinful habits or the effects of sinful influences will cease to bother a person when he or she becomes a Christian. It does mean that the Christian is no longer under the slavery of sin that he or she used to live under. Our senses create a problem for us here. The unsaved person may think he is not a slave to sin when he really is. Conversely the Christian may think he is a slave to sin though he is not. The fact remains: God has broken the chain that once bound us to sin, and happily we are free of its domination. Unfortunately we will not be free of its enticement until our glorification.

The translation "acquitted from sin" is legitimate but perhaps misleading. It implies a forensic relationship to sin, but Paul was speaking of our relationship to sin in daily living in this section (practical sanctification, not justification).

- 6:8 "If" could be "Since" (first class condition in Greek that in this case represents a condition genuinely true to reality). Believers *have* died with Christ. Paul now turned from discussing the effect that our union with Christ has on our problem with sin (vv. 6-7). He proceeded to explain the effect that our union with Him has on our problem with death. Death is the result of sin. Here physical resurrection is in view as is clear from the future tense (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57).¹⁹¹
- 6:9 Death could not hold Jesus Christ, our representative. It cannot hold the believer either. Furthermore neither He nor we will die a second time. We will never again come under the enslaving spiritual death-dealing power of sin.
- 6:10 Jesus Christ will never have to die again because when He died *for* sin He died *to* sin. This means that when He died His relationship to sin changed. It was never the same again. Sin now has no power over Him. After He paid for our sins, He was free to resume His intimate relationship with God forever.
- 6:11 Since God has united us with Christ we should "consider," "count," or "reckon" ourselves as those who are not under the dominating influence of sin any longer.¹⁹² The verb is a present imperative in the Greek text indicating that we should definitely and constantly view ourselves this

¹⁹¹Mounce, p. 152; Cranfield, 1:312-13; and others took this as referring to our life lived out here and now.

¹⁹²In some parts of the United States, "I reckon" means "I guess." That is not its meaning here. It means to count on something being true, to believe it.

way. We must realize that we are free to enjoy our new relationship with God forever.¹⁹³

Paul previously stressed the importance of knowing certain facts (vv. 3, 6, 9). Now he said that we should count on their being true. We must not just understand them but believe them. He used the same Greek word (*logisthesetai*) here as he did in his explanation of justification (2:26; 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24). God puts righteousness down on the believer's account. Similarly we should put it down as true that our relationship to sin and death has changed. Only as we do so will we relate to temptation, sin, and death realistically. If we fail to believe that sin no longer dominates us, we will be much more vulnerable to yield to temptation, to practice sin, and to fear death. However if we believe sin does not have that power, we will be more apt to resist temptation, to stay clear of sin, and to anticipate death less fearfully. "Consider" is in the present tense in the Greek text indicating that we need to maintain a realistic view of our relationship to sin (i.e., to "keep on considering").

"The word *reckon* is a word for *faith*—in the face of appearances."¹⁹⁴

6:12 Paul had expounded the reality and implications of the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (vv. 1-10). He had also urged his readers, therefore, to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God (v. 11). He now proceeded to call on them to present themselves to God in a decisive act of self-dedication (vv. 12-23).

"Therefore" draws a conclusion on the basis of what has preceded. Since believers know that we are no longer subject to sin's domination, and since we believe that is true, we should not let sin reign in our bodies (selves) any longer. Sin is no longer our master so we should stop carrying out its orders.¹⁹⁵ When temptation comes, we do not have to yield.

". . . 'passions' would include not only the physical lusts and appetites but also those desires that reside in the mind and will: the desire to have our own way, the desire to possess what other people have (cf. 7:7-8), the desire to have dominance over others."¹⁹⁶

6:13 In particular, we should not use our natural capacities to commit sin. Positively we should "present" or "offer" ourselves to God and ourselves

¹⁹³Don Matzat clarified well how Christians should view themselves in *Christ-Esteem*.

¹⁹⁴Newell, p. 225.

¹⁹⁵Probably Paul was giving a general prohibition, not implying that the Roman Christians in particular were letting sin reign over them (cf. 15:14-15).

¹⁹⁶Moo, p. 383.

as His tools to fulfill His will (cf. 12:1). The believer has a choice. We can present ourselves to sin or to God (cf. Eph. 4:17-32). The unbeliever only has this choice to a limited extent since he is the slave of sin.

"Some commentators think that Paul . . . pictures this 'presenting' as a 'once-for-all' action, or as ingressive ('start presenting'), or as urgent. But the aorist tense in itself does not indicate such nuances and nothing in the context here clearly suggests any of them. In fact, the aorist imperative often lacks any special force, being used simply to command that an action take place—without regard for the duration, urgency, or frequency of the action. This is probably the case here. However, we may surmise that, as the negative *not* presenting ourselves to sin is constantly necessary, so is the positive giving ourselves in service to God, our rightful ruler."¹⁹⁷

"The moment we come to exhortation, we have to do with the *will*; whereas believing is a matter of the heart: 'With the *heart* man believeth.'"¹⁹⁸

"Paul's first instruction ('know') centered in the *mind*, and this second instruction ('reckon') focuses on the *heart*. His third instruction touches the *will*."¹⁹⁹

THE CHRISTIAN'S THREE-FOLD ENEMY	
<u><i>Problem</i></u>	<u><i>Solution</i></u>
<p>The World (1 John 2:15-17)</p> <p>Lust of the flesh Lust of the eyes Pride of life</p>	<p>Flee (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22)</p>
<p>The flesh (Rom. 7:18-24)</p>	<p>Deny (Rom. 6:12-13; 8:13)</p>

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁹⁸Newell, p. 229.

¹⁹⁹Wiersbe, 1:532.

THE CHRISTIAN'S THREE-FOLD ENEMY	
<u>Problem</u>	<u>Solution</u>
The devil (1 Peter 5:8)	Resist (1 Peter 5:9)

Some Reformed interpreters believe that progressive sanctification is automatic. They believe that God automatically transforms every true Christian into the image of Christ during his or her present lifetime. If this transformation is not obvious, then the person professing to be a Christian must not be one. I would respond that he or she may not be, but there is another possibility.

"Is the Holy Spirit being allowed to transform your life?"

"There are only two possible answers: yes or no. If your answer is no, there are two possible reasons. Either you do not have the Spirit within you (i.e., you're not a Christian), or He is there but you prefer to live life on your own."²⁰⁰

"Why does the Lord want your body? To begin with, the believer's body is God's temple, and He wants to use it for His glory (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:20-21). But Paul wrote that the body is also God's tool and God's weapon (Rom. 6:13). God wants to use the members of the body as tools for building His kingdom and weapons for fighting His enemies."²⁰¹

6:14 The apostle concluded this section of his argument with a word of encouragement. Sin will no longer master the believer. The basic reason for this is that we are not under the Mosaic Law as the authority under which we live but under grace. Satan can no longer use the Law to hinder the believer's progress (cf. 3:23). God has redeemed us, not by the Law but by grace. We now live under that authority. Paul dealt with the tension this situation creates for the believer in chapter 7.

Usually grace refers to the principle by which God operates. Yet it also describes the sphere in which the believer lives, as here (cf. 5:2), as the

²⁰⁰Charles R. Swindoll, "Is the Holy Spirit Transforming You?" *Kindred Spirit* 18:1 (January-April 1994):7. This article is an excerpt from the writer's book *Flying Closer to the Flame*.

²⁰¹Wiersbe, 1:533.

Law describes the old realm. Under grace is not, however, a condition in which we are free from any responsibility (cf. Matt. 11:28-30; Titus 2:11-12), as Paul proceeded to clarify in verses 15-23.

"Romans 6 is the classic biblical text on the importance of relating the 'indicative' of what God has done for us with the 'imperative' of what we are to do. Paul stresses that we must actualize in daily experience the freedom from sin's lordship (cf. v. 14a) that is ours 'in Christ Jesus.'"²⁰²

2. Slavery to righteousness 6:15-23

In the first part of this chapter Paul explained that Christ has broken the bonds of sin that enslave the Christian (vv. 1-14). In the second part he warned that even though we are free we can become enslaved to sin by yielding to temptation (vv. 15-23; cf. John 8:34). Rather we should voluntarily yield ourselves as slaves to righteousness.

"Three words summarize the reasons for our yielding: *favor* (Rom. 6:14-15), *freedom* (Rom. 6:16-20), and *fruit* (Rom. 6:21-23)."²⁰³

6:15 Paul's question here is not a repetition of verse 1. There he asked if we could "continue in sin" or "go on sinning." Here he said, Shall we "sin?" There he was looking at continual sinning. Here he dealt with specific acts of sin. A sinful lifestyle and acts of sin are both inappropriate for a believer who is living under God's gracious authority.

6:16 Having presented himself to God in dedication (v. 13) the believer needs to obey Him. Obligation always follows dedication whether the dedication is to sin or to obedience. The outcome of dedication to sin is death (5:12; 8:13), but the outcome of dedication to obedience is righteousness. Imparted, moral righteousness (progressive sanctification) is in view here, not imputed righteousness (justification, cf. 5:19).

"Many people who have been convicted of the guilt of sin and have relied on the shed blood of Christ as putting away that guilt, have not yet, however, seen a state of sin as abject *slavery*."²⁰⁴

6:17 The form of teaching Paul had in mind was the teaching that the Lord Jesus Himself gave during His earthly ministry and then through His apostles (cf. Gal. 6:2) in contrast to the Mosaic Law. God had not forced Paul's readers to yield to it as to law. They had willingly embraced it as law for themselves. They had committed themselves to it from their

²⁰²Moo, pp. 390-91.

²⁰³Wiersbe, 1:533.

²⁰⁴Newell, p. 238.

hearts. Paul was not stressing the fact that the Lord had committed His teachings to his readers, as the AV translation implies, but that they had committed themselves to it.

6:18 The slavery of the readers to righteousness was therefore voluntary. It seems that because of his very nature man must be the slave of something. "Righteousness" here is the result of following Christian teaching, and it is the equivalent of godly living. It is righteous character and conduct.

Paul did not say that every believer takes advantage of his or her freedom from sin's tyranny to become a slave of God. He said his readers had done so, and in this he rejoiced. Dedication to God is voluntary, not automatic for the Christian (cf. v. 13; 12:1). If a believer does not truly dedicate himself or herself to God, he or she will continue to practice sin (v. 16).

6:19 Paul had put his teaching in human terms. He had compared the believer's situation to that of a free person on the one hand and to a slave on the other. He did this to help his readers grasp his point but evidently also to make a strong impact on them. Paul felt constrained to be very graphic and direct in view of their past. They had formerly deliberately yielded to sin. Now they needed to deliberately present (offer) themselves as slaves to God (cf. vv. 13, 16). This would result in their progressive sanctification. Note again that progressive sanctification is not totally passive or automatic. It requires some human action.

". . . what we most earnestly assert is that not only Paul here, but our Lord Himself, and Scripture generally, sets forth that *only those that know the truth and walk therein, are free.*"²⁰⁵

6:20 As an added incentive, Paul reminded his readers that when they had chosen the slavery to sin option in the past they did not gain any (moral) righteousness. They did not become more righteous in their conduct. What Paul said applied equally to their pre-conversion and post-conversion experience.

6:21 His readers reaped no benefits from their slavery to sin. Shame was its immediate result and death its final fruit.

6:22 Now in contrast they were free from sin's tyranny because of their union with Christ. If they presented themselves as slaves to God voluntarily, they could anticipate the sweet fruit of progressive sanctification (holiness) and fullness of eternal life (cf. John 10:10; 17:3). Eternal life is the immediate and the ultimate product of progressive sanctification.

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 242. Cf. John 8:31-32, 34, 36.

6:23 Paul brought his thoughts on this subject to a summary conclusion in this verse. The principle stated here is applicable to all people, believers and unbelievers. It contrasts the masters, sin and God, with the outcomes, death and eternal life. Paul also distinguished the means whereby death and life come to people. Death is the wage a person earns by his or her working, but eternal life is a gift free to those who rely on the work of Another.

Wages normally maintain life, but these wages result in death. Employers usually pay them out regularly and periodically rather than in a lump sum. Death also comes to the sinner regularly and periodically during the sinner's lifetime, not just when he or she dies. Furthermore wages are a right.

"Man has rights only in relation to sin, and these rights become his judgment. When he throws himself on God without claim, salvation comes to him."²⁰⁶

Verses 15-23 teach truth by way of contrasts. Obedience to sin yields unfruitfulness, shame, and death. Obedience to righteousness results in progressive sanctification and the fullness of eternal life.

In chapter 6 Paul prescribed three steps designed to promote practical sanctification. First, we must "know" certain facts about our union with Christ, specifically that sin no longer possesses the dominating power over the believer that it has over the unbeliever (vv. 3-10). Second, we must "reckon" (believe) these facts to be true of us personally (v. 11). Third, we must "present" ourselves to God in dedication as His slaves to perform righteousness (vv. 12-19). Each of these verbs has the force of an active command. Each represents something every believer should do. These are our basic responsibilities in our progressive sanctification regarding our relationship to sin.²⁰⁷

B. THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW CH. 7

Paul followed a similar pattern as he unpacked his revelation in this chapter as he did in the former one. He began chapter 6 by explaining that we are no longer the slaves of sin because of our union with Christ (6:1-14). He then warned us that we can, nevertheless, become slaves of sin if we yield to it (6:15-23). In chapter 7 he explained that we are no longer under obligation to keep the Mosaic Law because of our union with Christ (7:1-6). He then warned us that we can become slaves to our flesh, nonetheless, if we put ourselves under the Law (7:7-25).

²⁰⁶*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "opsonion," by H. W. Heiland, 5 (1967):592.

²⁰⁷See Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:351-54.

Paul needed to explain the believer's relationship to the Law because of people's natural tendency to view law as a means of making progress. The apostle had already shown that the Law has no value in justification (3:20). Now he spoke of it in relation to progressive sanctification. If believers are not under the Mosaic Law (6:14), what is our relationship to it?

"Something in human nature makes us want to go to extremes, a weakness from which Christians are not wholly free. 'Since we are saved by grace,' some argue, 'we are free to live as we please,' which is the extreme of *license*.

"'But we cannot ignore God's Law,' others argue. 'We are saved by grace, to be sure; but we must live under Law if we are to please God.' This is the extreme expression of *legalism*.

"Paul answered the first group in Romans 6; the second group he answered in Romans 7. The word *law* is used twenty-three times in this chapter. In Romans 6, Paul told us how to stop doing bad things; in Romans 7 he told how *not* to do good things."²⁰⁸

1. The law's authority 7:1-6

7:1 "Those who know law"—the article "the" before "law" is absent in the Greek text—were Paul's Roman readers. They lived in the capital of the empire where officials debated, enacted, and enforced laws. They of all people were very familiar with law and legal matters.

They would not have argued Paul's point that law has authority only over living people. We can anticipate where Paul would go with his argument since he earlier explained the believer's death with Christ. Since we have died with Christ law has no authority over us (cf. 6:14).

7:2-3 These verses illustrate the truth of the principle stated in verse 1. Paul's example was especially true in Jewish life where the Mosaic Law did not permit a woman to divorce her husband. In the illustration the wife represents the believer and the husband the Law.

"As a woman whose husband has died is free to marry another, so also are believers, since they have died to the law, free to belong to Christ."²⁰⁹

7:4 "Therefore" introduces an application of the illustration to the readers. The believer has not died to the Law (i.e., been freed from its binding

²⁰⁸Wiersbe, 1:534.

²⁰⁹Mounce, p. 160.

authority) because the Law died, but because we died with Christ.²¹⁰ The relationship that once existed between the believer and the Law no longer exists. The body of Jesus Christ is the literal body that died on the cross. Paul viewed Jesus again as our representative as in 5:12-21 and chapter 6 rather than as our substitute as in 3:25. Since we died with Christ we no longer have to live according to the Mosaic Law.

Every believer not only died with Christ but also arose with Him (6:14). Thus God has joined us to Christ. The phrase "might be joined to another" does not imply that our union is only a possibility. God did unite us with Christ (6:5). The result of our union should be fruit-bearing (cf. John 15:1-6; Gal. 5:23-23).

7:5 This is the first use of the term "the flesh" (NASB) in the ethical sense in Romans. As mentioned previously, it refers to our human nature, which is sinful. The NIV translators interpreted it as "sinful human nature." The description itself does not indicate whether the people in view are saved or unsaved since both have the flesh and operate by employing it. Here the context suggests that Paul had pre-conversion days in mind in this verse. Just as union with Christ can result in fruit (v. 4), so did life in the flesh. The works of the sinful nature eventually produce death. The Law aroused sinful passions by prohibiting them. Forbidden fruit is the sweetest kind in the mouth, but it often produces a stomachache (cf. Gen. 3).

7:6 Paul summarized verses 1-5 here. We died to the Law just as we died to sin (6:5). The same Greek word (*katargeo*) occurs in both verses. Christ's death as our representative changed (lit. rendered idle) our relationship to both entities. It is as though God shifted the transmissions of our lives into neutral gear. Now something else drives our lives, namely the Holy Spirit. Sin and the Law no longer drive us forward, though we can engage those powers if we choose to do so and take back control of our lives from God.

The contrast between the Spirit and the letter raises a question about whether Paul meant the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the Law (cf. 2:27-29). Both meanings are true so he could have intended either one or both. The definite article "the" is not in the Greek text. On the one hand, the spirit of the Mosaic Law restated by Christ and the apostles is what we are responsible to obey (6:13-19) rather than the letter of the Mosaic Law. On the other hand, we serve with the enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit, which most Old Testament believers did not possess.²¹¹ "Newness" or "new" (Gr. *kainoteti*) suggests something fresh rather than something recent. Our service is more recent, but Paul stressed the superiority,

²¹⁰We have died to the Mosaic Law (Torah), not to the Old Testament.

²¹¹See Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*.

freshness, and vitality of the believer's relationship to God having experienced union with Christ.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit was Paul's primary referent since he developed the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life in chapter 8. Spirit and flesh probably refer to the new and old covenants.²¹² The verse, of course, is saying nothing about the non-literal as contrasted with the literal interpretation of Scripture.

Paul did not say, "We have been released from the ceremonial part of the Law." The Mosaic Law was a unified code that contained moral, religious, and civil regulations that regulated the life of the Israelites (Exod. 20—Num. 10). God has terminated the whole code as a regulator of believers' lives (cf. 10:4). Christians have received a new code that Paul called the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). It contains some of the same commandments as the old Mosaic Code including nine of the Ten Commandments.²¹³ Nevertheless it is a new code. Thus Paul could say that God has released us from "the Law" of Moses. The Law of Christ consists of the teachings of Jesus Christ that He communicated during His earthly ministry that are in the New Testament. It also consists of teachings that He gave through His apostles and prophets following His ascension to heaven.²¹⁴ This is one of several passages that reveal that as Christians we have no obligation to keep the Law of Moses (cf. 10:4; 14:17; Mark 7:18-19; John 1:17; Acts 10:12; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:12; 9:10; Gal. 3:24; 4:9-11; 5:1).²¹⁵

2. The law's activity 7:7-12

Paul wrote that the believer is dead to both sin (6:2) and the Law (7:4). Are they in some sense the same? The answer is no (v. 7). The apostle referred to the relationship between sin and the Law in verse 5, but now he developed it more fully. Essentially his argument was that the Law is not sinful simply because it provides awareness of sin (cf. 3:20). The Law is similar to an X-ray machine that reveals a tumor. The machine itself is not bad simply because it reveals something bad. Likewise the Law is not sinful because it exposes sin.

The apostle probably appealed to his own personal experience in verses 7-12.²¹⁶ He broadened this into a more general picture of the struggle that every believer encounters

²¹²Moo, p. 421.

²¹³The one that Jesus did not carry over was the fourth commandment about Sabbath observance.

²¹⁴See Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):239-47.

²¹⁵More will be said about our relationship to the Mosaic Law when we come to 10:4.

²¹⁶The main alternative views are that he was speaking of Adam's experience, Israel's experience, or the experience of everyman. See Moo, pp. 425-31, for an explanation of these other views.

when he or she tries to serve God by obeying the Law.²¹⁷ Every believer feels frustrated by the operation of his or her sinful human nature (vv. 13-25).

"Before beginning the study of this great struggle of Paul's, let us get it settled firmly in our minds that Paul is here exercised not at all about pardon, but about deliverance: 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?' The whole question is concerning indwelling sin, as a power; and not committed sins, as a danger."²¹⁸

7:7 Paul's example of the Law, the tenth commandment, clarifies that by "the Law" he was not referring to the whole Old Testament. He meant the Mosaic Law and particularly the moral part of it, namely the Ten Commandments. Reformed theologians like to distinguish the moral from the ceremonial parts of the Mosaic Law. Many of them contend that God has only terminated the ceremonial part of the Law.²¹⁹ However here Paul, arguing that the Christian is dead to the Law, used one of the Ten Commandments as an example of the Law. He was not saying, however, that immoral behavior is all right for the Christian (cf. 8:4).

Paul's use of "sin" in this paragraph shows that he was thinking of sin as a force within everyone, our sinful human nature. He was not thinking of an act of sin. It is that force or sin principle that the Law's prohibitions and requirements arouse. The basic meaning of the Greek word translated "sin" (*hamartia*) is "falling short." We see that we fall short of what God requires when we become aware of His laws.

"The Law is a mirror that reveals the inner man and shows us how dirty we are (James 1:22-25)."²²⁰

The demands of the Law, in this case "Thou shalt not covet," make us consciously aware of our sin. Probably Paul selected the tenth commandment for his illustration because it deals with desires (i.e., illicit desires of every kind). Our desires are the roots of our actions. The tenth commandment is also the most convicting commandment. Everyone who is honest would have to admit that he or she has broken it.

7:8 One illustration of what Paul had in mind here is the story of the temptation and Fall in Genesis 3. Whenever someone establishes a law prohibiting something, the natural tendency of people is to resist it. If you tell a small child, "Don't do such-and-such," you may create a desire within him or her to do it, a desire that was not there before.

²¹⁷Others hold that Paul was describing the experience of an unbeliever. Discussion of these views will follow.

²¹⁸Newell, p. 261.

²¹⁹See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:458-60.

²²⁰Wiersbe, 1:535.

"Suppose a man determined to drive his automobile to the very limit of its speed. If . . . signs along the road would say, No Speed Limit, the man's only thought would be to press his machine forward. But now suddenly he encounters a road with frequent signs limiting speed to thirty miles an hour. The man's will rebels, and his rebellion is aroused still further by threats: Speed Limit Strictly Enforced. Now the man drives on fiercely, conscious both of his desire to 'speed,' and his rebellion against restraint. The speed limit signs did not create the wild desire to rush forward: that was there before. But the notices brought the man into conscious conflict with authority."²²¹

"Coveting" or "desire" covers a wide range of appetites, not just sexual desires, which the AV translation "lust" (and "concupiscence," v. 8) implies.

"Dead" here means dormant or inactive but not completely impotent, as is clear from verse 9 where this "dead" sin springs to life. The absence of the verb before "dead" in the Greek text indicates that what Paul was saying was a generalization rather than a specific historical allusion.

7:9 Paul was relatively alive apart from the Law. No one is ever completely unrelated to it. However in his past, Paul had lived unaware of the Law's true demands and was therefore self-righteous (cf. Phil. 3:6). His preconversion struggles were mainly intellectual (e.g., Was Jesus the Messiah?) rather than moral.

"Saul of Tarsus could have headed the Spanish Inquisition, and have had no qualms of conscience!"²²²

When the commandment entered Paul's consciousness, it aroused sin, and he died in the sense that he became aware of his spiritual deadness. He was not speaking of His union with Christ in death here.

7:10 The intent of the Law was to bring people blessing (life) as they obeyed it (Lev. 18:5). Nevertheless because Paul did not obey it, he found that it condemned him.

". . . it seems fair to conclude that the law would have given life *had it been perfectly obeyed.*"²²³

²²¹Newell, pp. 265-66.

²²²Ibid., p. 268.

7:11 Paul personified sin as acting here. Sin plays the part of the tempter. It deceived Paul and slew him (cf. Gen. 3). Paul's sinful nature urged him to do the very thing the commandment forbade.

"As the new Christian grows, he comes into contact with various philosophies of the Christian life. He can read books, attend seminars, listen to tapes, and get a great deal of information. If he is not careful, he will start following a human leader and accept his teachings as Law. This practice is a very subtle form of legalism, and it kills spiritual growth. No human teacher can take the place of Christ; no book can take the place of the Bible. Men can give us information, but only the Spirit can give us illumination and help us understand spiritual truths. The Spirit enlightens us and enables us; no human leader can do that."²²⁴

7:12 Here is a reaffirmation of the answer to Paul's question in verse 7. Far from being sinful the Law is holy. It comes from a holy God and searches out sin. It is righteous because it lays just requirements on people and because it forbids and condemns sin. It is good because its purpose is to produce blessing and life (v. 10).

3. The law's inability 7:13-25

In verses 13-25 Paul continued to describe his personal struggle with sin but with mounting intensity. The forces of external law and internal sin (i.e., his sinful nature) conflicted. He found no deliverance from this conflict except through the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 25). I believe what Paul was describing here was his own personal struggle as a Christian to obey the law and so overcome the promptings of his sinful nature (flesh) to disobey it. Note the present tenses in his testimony. Without God's help he could not succeed. I will say more in defense of this view later. However what he wrote here is not normal or necessary Christian experience. Paul experienced this struggle as a believer before he understood his new relationship to the Law as a believer in Christ, which he explained in this chapter.

7:13 Paul next explained the Law's relationship to death. The responsibility for death belongs to sin, not the Law. Sin's use of something good, the Law, to bring death shows its utter sinfulness.

7:14 As a foundation for what follows, the apostle reminded his readers that all the godly ("we") know that the Law is "spiritual" (Gr. *pneumatikos*). It

²²³Moo, p. 439.

²²⁴Wiersbe, 1:536.

came from God (cf. vv. 22, 25). Paul did not want his readers to understand what he was about to say about the Law as a criticism of God who gave it.

In contrast to the good Law, Paul was fleshly or unspiritual (Gr. *sarkinos*, made of flesh; cf. 1 Cor. 2:1). Man is essentially different from the Law because we have a sinful nature whereas the Law is itself sinless. Therefore there is a basic antagonism between people and the Law.

"'Sold under sin' is exactly what the new convert does not know! Forgiven, justified, he knows himself to be: and he has the joy of it! But now to find an evil nature, of which he had never become really conscious, and of which he thought himself fully rid, when he first believed, is a 'second lesson' which is often more bitter than the first—of guilt!"²²⁵

Paul's statement that he was then as a Christian the slave of sin seems to contradict what he wrote earlier in chapter 6 about no longer being the slave of sin.²²⁶ However remember that in chapter 6 Paul did not say that being dead to sin means that sin has lost its appeal for the Christian. It still has a strong appeal to the Christian whose human nature is still sinful (6:15-23). He said that being dead to sin means that we no longer must follow sin's dictates.

In one sense the Christian is not a slave of sin (6:1-14). We have died to it, and it no longer dominates us. Nevertheless in another sense sin still has a strong attraction for us since our basic human nature is still sinful and we retain that nature throughout our lifetime. For example, a criminal released from prison no longer has to live within the sphere of existence prescribed by prison walls. However he still has to live within the confines of his human limitations. God has liberated Christians from the prison house of sin (6:1-14). Notwithstanding we still carry with us a sinful nature that will be a source of temptation for us as long as we live (7:14-25).

To minimize the difficulty of grasping this distinction Paul used different expressions to describe the two relationships. In chapter 6 he used "slaves," but in chapter 7 he wrote "sold" (v. 14). In chapter 6 he spoke of the relationship of the new man in Christ (the whole person, the Christian) to sin. In chapter 7 he spoke of the relationship of the old nature (a part of every person including the new man in Christ) to sin. Adam sold all human beings into bondage to sin when he sinned (5:12, 14).

²²⁵Newell, p 272.

²²⁶The phrase "sold in bondage to sin" is strong proof to many interpreters that Paul was describing a non-Christian here.

7:15 Paul's sinful human nature influenced him to such an extent that he found himself volitionally doing (approving) the very things that he despised intellectually. This caused him to marvel. We all identify with him.

"We must constantly remember throughout this struggle that it is not a description by the apostle Paul of an experience he was having when he wrote this Epistle! but an experience of a regenerate man before he knows either about indwelling sin, or that he died to sin and to the Law which gives sin its power; and who also does not know the Holy Spirit, as an indwelling presence and power against sin."²²⁷

7:16 The apostle's attitude toward the Law was not the reason for his dilemma.

7:17 Rather his problem was traceable to the sin that dwelt within him, namely his sinful nature. Paul was not trying to escape responsibility but was identifying the source of his sin, his sinful nature. "I" describes the new man Paul had become at his conversion (Gal. 2:20). Viewed as a whole person he was dead to sin. Nevertheless the source of sin within him was specifically his sinful human nature that was still very much alive.

It comes as a terrible discovery for a new believer, or an untaught believer, to realize that our problem with sin is complex. We are sinners not only because we commit acts of sin (ch. 3) and because, as descendants of Adam, we share guilt because of his sin (ch. 5). We are also sinners because we possess a nature that is thoroughly sinful (ch. 7). Jesus Christ paid the penalty for acts of sin, He removed the guilt of original sin, and He enables us to overcome the power of innate sin.

7:18 "In general, we may say that in verses 14-17, the emphasis is upon the practicing what is hated,—that is, the inability to overcome evil in the flesh; while in verses 18-21, the emphasis is upon the failure to do the desired good,—the inability, on account of the flesh, to do right.

"Thus the double failure of a quickened man either to overcome evil or to accomplish good—is set forth. There must come in help from *outside, beyond himself!*"²²⁸

Paul meant that sin had thoroughly corrupted his nature ("flesh"). Even though he was a Christian he was still a totally depraved sinner (3:10-18, 23). He knew what he should do, but he did not always do it.

²²⁷Newell, p. 273.

²²⁸Ibid., p. 270.

- 7:19-20 These verses restate the idea of verses 15 and 17 respectively. Paul evidently repeated the ideas to heighten our appreciation for the sense of frustration that he felt.
- 7:21 The statement of this "principle" or "law" summarizes Paul's thought.²²⁹
- 7:22-23 Intellectually Paul argued that he should obey the Mosaic Law (v. 22), but morally he found himself in rebellion against what he knew was right. This natural rebelliousness was something he could not rid himself of.

"It is because people do not recognize their all-badness that they do not find Christ all in all to them."²³⁰

Happily Paul explained in chapter 8 that someone with infinite power can enable us to control our rebelliousness.

- 7:24 The agony of this tension and our inability to rid ourselves of our sinful nature that urges us to do things that lead to death come out even more strongly here. What Christian has not felt the guilt and pain of doing things that he or she knows are wrong? We will never escape this battle with temptation in this life. Eugene Peterson recast Paul's thought in this verse as follows.

"I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me?"²³¹

- 7:25 The solution to this dilemma is not escape from temptation but victory over it.

"The source of Paul's wretchedness is clear. It is not a 'divided self' [i.e., old nature versus new nature], but the fact that the last hope of mankind, religion, has proven to be a broken reed. Through sin it is no longer a comfort but an accusation. Man needs not a law but deliverance."²³²

The last part of this verse is another summary. "I myself" contrasts with "Jesus Christ." Apparently Paul wanted to state again the essence of the struggle that he had just described to prepare his readers for the grand deliverance that he expounded in the next chapter.

²²⁹See Saucy, "'Sinners' Who . . .," pp. 405-11.

²³⁰Newell, p. 278.

²³¹Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, p. 317.

²³²Barrett, p. 151.

There are two problems involving the interpretation of chapter 7 that merit additional attention. The first is this. Was Paul relating his own unique experience, or was he offering his own struggle as an example of something everyone experiences? Our experience would lead us to prefer the latter alternative. Certainly Paul must have undergone this struggle since he said he did. However every human being does as well because we all possess some knowledge of the law of God, general revelation if not special revelation or the Mosaic Law, and a sinful human nature.

The second question is this. Does the struggle Paul described in verses 14-25 picture the experience of an unsaved person or a Christian?

ARGUMENTS FOR THE UNSAVED VIEW

PRO

CON

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | This was the most popular view among the early church fathers. | Other views held by the fathers have since proved false. |
| 2. | The terminology "of flesh" or "unspiritual," and "sold into bondage to sin" or "sold as a slave to sin" (v. 14) fits an unbeliever better than a Christian. | These are appropriate terms to use in describing the Christian's relationship to his or her sinful human nature. |
| 3. | If 7:14-25 describes Christians, it conflicts with how Paul described them in 6:3. | Two different relationships of the Christian are in view in these two passages. In chapter 6 our relationship to sin is in view, but in chapter 7 it is our relationship to our human nature. |

ARGUMENTS FOR THE UNSAVED VIEW**PRO**

4. 8:1 marks a change from dealing with the unsaved to the saved condition.
5. The absence of references to the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, except in v. 25, shows that an unsaved person is in view here.

CON

- 8:1 marks a transition from the domination of the sinful human nature to deliverance through Jesus Christ.
- Paul's argument did not require these references since the conflict in view is between the law and the flesh (human nature).

ARGUMENTS FOR THE SAVED VIEW**PRO**

1. Augustine and the Reformers held this view.
2. The change from past tense in 7:7-13 to present tense in 7:14-25 indicates that verses 14-25 describe Paul's post-conversion experience.
3. If Paul described his pre-Christian life here, he contradicted what he said of it in Philippians 3:6.

CON

- Older support by the church fathers favors the other view.
- Paul used the present tense in verses 14-25 for vividness of expression.
- In Philippians 3 Paul described his standing before other people, but here he described his relationship to God.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE UNSAVED VIEW**PRO****CON**

- | | PRO | CON |
|----|--|--|
| 4. | The argument of the epistle proceeds from justification (chs. 3—5) to sanctification (chs. 6—8). | In chapter 6 Paul also referred to preconversion experience (vv. 6, 8). |
| 5. | The conflict is true to Christian experience. | It is only apparently characteristic of Christian experience since the Christian is dead to sin. |
| 6. | The last part of verse 25 implies that this conflict continues after one acknowledges that deliverance comes through Jesus Christ. | The end of verse 25 is only a final summary statement. |

As mentioned previously, I believe the evidence for the saved view is stronger.²³³

The conflict described in verses 13-25 is not the same one that Paul presented in Galatians 5:16-23. The opponent of the sinful human nature in Romans 7 is the whole Christian individual, but in Galatians 5 it is the Holy Spirit. The condition of the believer in Romans is under the Law, but in Galatians it is under Law or grace. The result of the conflict in Romans is inevitable defeat, but in Galatians it is defeat or victory. The nature of the conflict in Romans is abnormal Christian experience, but in Galatians it is normal Christian experience.²³⁴

This chapter is very important for several reasons. It corrects the popular idea that our struggle with sin is only against specific sins and habits whereas it is also against our

²³³This is also the view of MacArthur, pp. 123-38. Moo, pp. 442-51, has a good discussion of the problem, and he concluded that Paul was describing his own experience as a typical unregenerate Israelite. For a different interpretation, see Walt Russell, "Insights from Postmodernism's Emphasis on Interpretive Communities in the Interpretation of Romans 7," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (December 1994):511-27.

²³⁴See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contrast Between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):310-14.

basic human nature. Second, it shows that human nature is not essentially good but bad. Third, it argues that progressive sanctification does not come by obeying laws, a form of legalism called nomism, but apart from law. It also proves that doing right requires more than just determining to do it. All these insights are necessary for us to appreciate what Paul proceeded to explain in chapter 8.

Related to the question of the believer's relationship to the law is the subject of legalism.

"Legalism is that fleshly attitude which conforms to a code in order to glorify self. It is not the code itself. Neither is it participation or nonparticipation. It is the *attitude* with which we approach the standards of the code and ultimately the God who authored it."²³⁵

Legalism also involves judging the behavior of ourselves or others as acceptable or unacceptable to God by the standard of obedience to laws that we rather than God have imposed. Someone else has defined legalism (really nomism) as the belief that I can obtain justification and or sanctification simply by obeying rules.

SOME RESULTS OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST IN ROMANS 6 AND 7		
Chapter	Six	Seven
Subject	The believer's relationship to sin	The believer's relationship to the Law
Our former condition	Enslavement to sin (cf. 6:1-11)	Obligation to the Law (cf. 7:1-6)
Our present condition	No longer slaves of sin (cf. 6:12-14)	No longer obligated to keep the Law (cf. 7:7-13)
Our present danger	Becoming slaves to sin by yielding to it (cf. 6:15-18)	Becoming incapable of overcoming the flesh by trying to keep the Law (cf. 7:14-24)
Our present responsibility	Present ourselves to God and our members as His instruments (cf. 6:19-23)	Trust and obey God who alone can enable us to overcome the flesh (cf. 7:25ff)

²³⁵Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God*, p. 120.

C. THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD CH. 8

"Spener is reported to have said that if holy Scripture was a ring, and the Epistle to the Romans its precious stone, chap. viii would be the sparkling point of the jewel."²³⁶

"It is undoubtedly the chapter of chapters for the life of the believer . . ."²³⁷

As the fifth chapter climaxed Paul's revelation concerning the justification of the sinner, so the eighth culminates the truth concerning the sanctification of the saint. Both chapters end by affirming the eternal security of the believer. In chapter 5 our security depends on the Son's life and in chapter 8 on the Spirit's power, both of which rest on the Father's love.²³⁸

This chapter explains the benefits of sanctification made available through the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit who indwells every believer.²³⁹

"It is altogether too narrow a view to see in this portion simply the antidote to the wretched state pictured in chapter 7. Actually the chapter gathers up various strands of thought from the entire discussion of both justification and sanctification and ties them together with the crowning knot of glorification."²⁴⁰

1. Our deliverance from the flesh by the power of the Spirit 8:1-11

The statement of the believer's condition 8:1-4

8:1 "Therefore" introduces a conclusion based on everything that Paul wrote from chapter 3 on, not just chapter 7. He reaffirmed justification as the indispensable basis for sanctification.²⁴¹ A Christian must believe that he or she has permanent acceptance with God before that one will grow much in grace and godliness.

²³⁶Godet, p. 295.

²³⁷Thomas, p. 200.

²³⁸This chapter contains the greatest concentration of references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, an average of one almost every two verses.

²³⁹See Dillow, pp. 358-82.

²⁴⁰Harrison, p. 85.

²⁴¹For three ways of interpreting the basis of no condemnation, see Chuck Lowe, "'There Is No Condemnation' (Romans 8:1): But Why Not?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:2 (June 1999):231-50.

"Romans 3:20 shows the 'therefore' of condemnation; but Romans 8:1 gives the 'therefore' of *no* condemnation . . ."242

No condemnation is different from freedom from judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). No condemnation means that God will never condemn us to an eternity separate from Himself for our sins. The reason is that the believer is in Christ Jesus. The Savior has suffered the consequences of our sins as our substitute. He will experience no condemnation, and we as those He represents will not either. Note the absolute force of this great promise. We are eternally secure!

"The Law condemns; but the believer has a new relationship to the Law, and therefore he cannot be condemned."243

- 8:2 Paul used "law" here figuratively for "principle" (v. 23). He was not referring to the Mosaic Law (cf. 7:21). These laws refer to the certainty and regularity that characterize the operations of the Spirit and sin. The Spirit's work that comes to us because of faith in Jesus Christ leads to fullness of life, and sin leads to death. Ultimate ends are again in view.

"The subject here is no longer Christ's work for us, but the Spirit's work within us. Without the Spirit within as a law of life, there would be nothing but condemnation: for the new creature has no power within himself apart from the blessed Spirit,—as against a life of perpetual bondage to the flesh,—'the end of which things is death' (6.21)."244

- 8:3 The Mosaic Law cannot set us free from sin and death (v. 2; cf. ch. 7) because its only appeal is to the basic nature of man. It urges us intellectually to obey God, but it does not provide sufficient power for obedience. Fortunately God sent His own Son out of the depths of His love to deal effectively with sin.

Paul referred to both the person and work of Christ in this verse. Jesus Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (cf. Phil. 2:7), not "in sinful flesh" or "in the likeness of flesh." He was both sinless and a real person.

"For sin," the literal Greek rendering, has a wider connotation than "as an offering for sin" or "a sin offering" and is the better translation. The Law

242Wiersbe, 1:538.

243Ibid.

244Newell, p. 288.

could not deal with sin. Consequently God sent His own Son to do so. That is the point of the verse.

"The battle was joined and the triumph secured in that same flesh which in us is the seat and agent of sin."²⁴⁵

"The 'law of double jeopardy' states that a man cannot be tried twice for the same crime. Since Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sins, and since you are 'in Christ,' God will not condemn you."²⁴⁶

8:4 Here the purpose of the Incarnation appears in the context of the struggle of chapter 7. God fulfills the Law's requirements in us by His Spirit who indwells and empowers us. However this is not automatic because He indwells us. He fulfills them if and as we walk by the Spirit rather than walking according to the flesh. Walking by the Spirit means walking in submission to and dependence on the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16). Walking according to the flesh means behaving as the flesh dictates and allowing our sinful nature to govern our lives.

"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."²⁴⁷

The explanation of the believer's condition 8:5-11

8:5 Here Paul began to elaborate the difference between "flesh" and "Spirit." This distinction is difficult to grasp because both terms have more than one meaning. To "*walk* according to the flesh" (v. 4) means to carry out in conduct what the human nature desires. To "*be* according to the flesh" (v. 5) means to allow the human nature to dominate one's life. To "*be* in the flesh" (v. 8) is to be unregenerate, to be devoid of the Spirit.

The "Spirit" seems from the context to refer to the Holy Spirit rather than to the regenerated spirit of man. Those who prefer the second view tend to describe man as having two natures, an old sinful one and a new one that would be the same as this regenerated human spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16-17). In favor of the former view, the chapter began with a clear reference to the

²⁴⁵John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:282.

²⁴⁶Wiersbe, 1:539. The "law of double jeopardy" is a universally recognized principle of justice.

²⁴⁷Moo, p. 485.

Holy Spirit (v. 2). Other following references to "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) would therefore normally be to the same Spirit. Furthermore, it is reasonable that in identifying the basis for Christian victory Paul would point to the ultimate source, the Holy Spirit, rather than to a secondary agent, our human spirit.

8:6 A mind set on following the flesh concentrates on and desires the things of the flesh (cf. Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:2). The end of that attitude is ultimately death. However a mind set on yielding to the Spirit will experience life and peace. Peace with God (reconciliation) seems to be in view here. Still whenever there is peace with God, peace with other people normally follows.

8:7-8 A mind set on the flesh is essentially hostile toward God. To set one's mind on the flesh is contrary to God's law.

From the end of verse 7 it seems clear that Paul was thinking of an unsaved person (cf. vv. 8-9). Evidently he wanted "to expose the flesh in its stark reality as being totally alien to God and his purpose."²⁴⁸ What interests a person reveals his or her essential being. It is possible to walk according to the flesh (vv. 4-5) and not to be in the flesh, however. In other words, it is possible to live as an unregenerate person even though one has experienced regeneration.

8:9 "However" marks a contrast. Paul's readers were not those who only had a sinful human nature. They also had the indwelling Holy Spirit. We could translate the first "if" as "since" (first class condition in Greek) because here it represents a condition that Paul assumed was true to reality. Everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ in the age in which we live possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:13).

"Here the great mark of a true Christian is, that the Spirit of God dwells in him."²⁴⁹

This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture that corrects the false notion that baptism with the Spirit is a second work of grace for the Christian.

"Nowhere in Scripture do we find a clearer indication that the Spirit enters a person's life at the moment of conversion (cf. also 1 Cor 12:13). If the Spirit needed to wait for some subsequent commitment to holiness, it follows that he would be absent between conversion and that later point in

²⁴⁸Harrison, p. 89.

²⁴⁹Newell, p. 299.

time. But that cannot be because Paul clearly indicated that a person without the Spirit does not belong to Christ."²⁵⁰

8:10 Note the close affinity between the Spirit and the Son in this verse and the last. "If" is again "since." The Spirit's indwelling means that God indwells (cf. Eph. 3:16-17).

"Spirit" in this verse also probably refers to the Holy Spirit. The context favors this interpretation as does the sense of the verse. "Alive" is literally "life" (cf. v. 2). The meaning of the clause seems to be this. The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual life for the redeemed person who now possesses Jesus Christ's imputed righteousness.

". . . whenever you see a Christian living the Christian life, you are witnessing a resurrection miracle!"²⁵¹

The "body" represents the whole person, not just his or her physical shell. This was Paul's normal meaning when he used this word.²⁵²

8:11 The Spirit in view is again God's Spirit. The point is that the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus will also raise believers.

"The Spirit is both the instrumental cause of the resurrection-act and the permanent substratum of the resurrection-life."²⁵³

This verse constitutes a powerful argument for the physical resurrection of believers.

2. Our new relationship to God 8:12-17

The application of the believer's condition 8:12-13

8:12 Because of what God has done for us (vv. 1-11), believers have an obligation to respond appropriately. However we can only do so with the Spirit's help. Paul stated only the negative side of our responsibility here. He could have gone on to say ". . . but to God, to live according to the Spirit." He planned to stress that in the verses that follow.

This verse teaches clearly that the believer still has a sinful human nature within him even though he has died with Christ. God does not eradicate

²⁵⁰Mounce, pp. 178-79.

²⁵¹Zane Hodges, "The Death/Life Option," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:11 (November 1991):3.

²⁵²*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s. v. "soma," by Eduard Schweizer, 7 (1971):1064.

²⁵³Gerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 169.

the believer's flesh at conversion. Therefore we must not "*live [walk]* according to" it. Progressive sanctification is not something the Christian may take or leave. God commanded us to pursue it (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3-11).

8:13 Christians who consistently follow the dictates of the flesh can look forward to death. This cannot be eternal death, separation from God forever, in view of specific promises to the contrary (e.g., vv. 1, 31-39). Therefore it must mean temporal death. Sin produces death in many forms, for example, separation of the body from the soul (physical death that may be premature for those who follow the flesh; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). It may be separation of the person from others (death in social relationships) or separation of the person from himself (psychological alienation and disorders).

Conversely believers who follow God's will with the enablement of the Holy Spirit and put the deeds of the body (i.e., the flesh; cf. 6:6) to death will experience abundant life. It is possible to possess eternal life and yet not experience it fully (John 10:10). Only Christians who follow God faithfully will experience their eternal life to its fullest potential. This fullness of life involves psychological and social wholeness and well as physical longevity under normal circumstances.

The present tense of the verbs is significant. This tense stresses the necessity of continually putting to death the deeds of the flesh. Paul viewed the presentation of ourselves to God as an initial act of commitment (6:13; 12:1), but He wrote that we must daily and hourly choose to mortify our flesh (cf. 13:14).

"Here is a terrible warning: . . . It is one of the great red lights by which God keeps His elect out of fatal paths. . . .

"For we must note most carefully that a holy life is to be lived *by us*. It is not that we have any power,—we have none. But God's Spirit dwells in us for the express object of being called 'upon by us to put to death the doings of the body.' Self-control is one of that sweet cluster called 'the fruit of the Spirit,' in Galatians 5:22."²⁵⁴

The attestation of the believer's condition 8:14-17

Verses 14-17 explain the Spirit's ministry of confirming the reality of the believer's position as a son of God to him or her. Paul believed that the believer who is aware of his or her secure position will be more effective in mortifying his or her flesh.

²⁵⁴Newell, pp. 307, 309.

8:14 Paul wrote to the Galatians that the law leads people to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The Holy Spirit does this too (John 16:8-11). Having come to Christ the Holy Spirit continues to lead us in the moral will of God. The Holy Spirit leads every true child of God (Gal. 5:18). He goes before us and expects us to follow Him as a shepherd does his sheep. However we can choose to follow or not to follow Him, to walk according to the Spirit or to walk according to the flesh (v. 13). The Spirit leads us objectively through the Scriptures and subjectively by His internal promptings (John 20:31; 1 John 3:24; 5:13; Rom 8:16; Gal. 4:6).²⁵⁵

"There is deep mystery, no doubt, in the great double fact of [sic] God is working in us to will, and on the other hand, of our choosing His will, moment by moment. We can only affirm that both are taught in Scripture . . ." ²⁵⁶

8:15 Unlike sin the Spirit does not enslave us. He does not compel or force us to do God's will as slaves of God. Rather He appeals to us to do so as sons of God. The "spirit" in view is probably the Holy Spirit who has made us God's sons by regeneration and adoption.

"Abba" and "Father" are equivalent terms the first being a transliteration of the Aramaic word and the second a translation of the Greek *pater* (cf. Gal. 4:6). Probably Paul used the Aramaic as well as the Greek term to highlight the intimate relationship the Christian disciple enjoys with God. The Lord Jesus revealed this intimate relationship during His training of the Twelve (Mark 14:36).²⁵⁷ In their translations J. B. Phillips paraphrased "Abba! Father!" as "Father, my Father," and Arthur S. Way rendered it, "My Father, my own dear Father."

Adoption is another legal term (cf. justification). It indicates the legal bestowal of a legal standing. Both adoption and justification result in a permanent condition, and both rest on the love and grace of God.²⁵⁸

"Paul could hardly have chosen a better term than 'adoption' to characterize this peace and security. The word denoted the Greek, and particularly Roman, legal institution whereby one can 'adopt' a child and confer on that child all the legal rights and privileges that would ordinarily accrue to a natural child. However, while the

²⁵⁵See Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit*. Another view is that to be "led by the Spirit" here, and in Gal. 5:18, means that the Spirit determines the direction of one's life as a whole rather than that He guides us (e.g., Moo, p. 498).

²⁵⁶Newell, p. 310.

²⁵⁷See Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, p. 28.

²⁵⁸See Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (December 1969):458-66.

institution is a Greco-Roman one, the underlying concept is rooted in the OT and Judaism [i.e., God's adoption of Israel]."²⁵⁹

8:16 God has provided the believer with two witnesses to his or her salvation, the Holy Spirit and our human spirit (cf. Deut. 17:6; Matt. 18:16). The former witness is objective in Scripture and subjective (cf. v. 14) while the latter is only subjective.²⁶⁰

The term "children" identifies our family relationship based on regeneration whereas "sons" stresses our legal standing based on adoption.

8:17 Being a child of God makes us His heirs (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-4). We inherit with Jesus Christ our brother (v. 29). We inherit both sufferings, as His disciples now, and glory, most of which lies in the future (cf. 1 Pet. 4:13). The phrase "if indeed" seeks to render the first class condition in the Greek that in this case we could translate "since." Just as surely as we share His sufferings (Gr. *sumpaschomen*, any sufferings, not just those connected with our bearing witness for Christ) now we will share His glory in the future. This is a reference to the glorification that every believer will experience at the end of his or her life (vv. 18-25). Our glory then will be in proportion to our suffering for His sake as His disciples now (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-19).

The New Testament teaches that the amount of inheritance the children of God receive will vary depending on our faithfulness to God (Luke 19:11-27). However, there is no doubt that all Christians are the heirs of God and will inherit glorification as well as many other blessings (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-12).²⁶¹

"All regenerate men have God as their inheritance, or as Paul puts it, are 'heirs of God' (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7). That heirship is received on the basis of only one work, the work of believing. But there is another inheritance in the New Testament, an inheritance which, like that of the Israelites, is merited. They are also heirs of the kingdom and joint-heirs with the Messiah (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17)."²⁶²

This verse is not teaching that experiencing glorification, the third stage of every believer's salvation, depends on our suffering for Jesus' sake. God

²⁵⁹Moo, p. 501.

²⁶⁰Another view is that the Holy Spirit bears witness to God when we pray (v. 15). See Robert N. Wilkin, "Assurance by Inner Witness?" *Grace Evangelical Society News* 8:2 (March-April 1993):2-3. Incidentally, this second reference to "spirit" is the only one in Rom. 8 that is not a reference to the Holy Spirit.

²⁶¹For a study of the variable factors in inheriting, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*.

²⁶²Dillow, p. 55.

will eventually glorify every Christian, those who take a stand for the Lord and those who do not (vv. 29-39).

"Such passages leave *no room at all* for a 'partial rapture!'
All the saints will share Christ's glory."²⁶³

3. Our present sufferings and future glory 8:18-25

Paul proceeded to expound on the thought that he introduced at the end of verse 17. This passage gives a very wide perspective of God's great plan of redemption, which is the heart of Paul's theology.²⁶⁴

8:18 In the light of eternity we should view the cost of suffering with Jesus Christ now as insignificant in view of the glory that lies ahead for us (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17). Paul again used a word, *pathemata*, that means sufferings for any reason and in any form. By glory Paul meant the glory that we will experience at our glorification (v. 17). Our glorification is the third and final aspect of our salvation in which God will deliver us from the presence of sin forever. The Greek preposition *eis* can mean either "to" (NASB) or "in" (NIV) and probably includes both ideas here in view of the vastness of this glory.

8:19 Paul broadened his view of glorification to include all of creation. He personified it as leaning forward eagerly in anticipation of the great day in which God will fully redeem it too (cf. Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). Then God will reveal His sons as such whereas now we appear simply as Adam's sons.

". . . the word here translated 'revealing' is *apokalupsis*, a removal of a covering,—as when some wonderful statue has been completed and a veil thrown over it, people assemble for the 'unveiling' of this work of art. It will be as when sky rockets are sent up on a festival night: rockets which, covered with brown paper, seem quite common and unattractive, but up they are sent into the air and then they are revealed in all colors of beauty, and the multitude waiting below shout in admiration. Now the saints are wrapped up in the common brown paper of flesh, looking outwardly like other folks. But the whole creation is waiting for their unveiling at Christ's coming, for they are connected with Christ, one with Him, and are to be glorified *with Him* at His coming."²⁶⁵

²⁶³Newell, p. 317.

²⁶⁴See Don N. Howell, Jr., "The Center of Pauline Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):50-70.

²⁶⁵Newell, p. 320.

- 8:20 Because of the Fall God subjected the whole creation to "futility" or "frustration." Consequently it never reaches the perfection that He originally intended it to achieve. Probably God is in view as the one who subjected it though Satan and Adam were instrumental in that action.
- 8:21 In view of prophecies concerning creation's restoration during Messiah's earthly reign, that time was probably in Paul's mind (Jer. 30:23-24; 35). Paul did not have the annihilation of the present earth in view, which will happen at the end of Messiah's earthly reign (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11-13). He was writing of its transformation at the beginning of that reign.
- 8:22 The creation (excluding man, v. 23) acts as though it is going through birth pains in that it is straining to produce its fruit. Its sufferings are both a result of past events and a portent of future deliverance (cf. v. 20; Matt. 19:28).
- 8:23 The saints share the sense of groaning and anticipation that Paul described the creation feeling. God will fully redeem both it and us finally. However only the saints have the firstfruits of the Spirit.

God commanded the Israelites to present a portion of their harvest that ripened first as an offering to Himself (Exod. 23:19; Neh. 10:35). This offering acknowledged that the whole harvest was from Him and was really His. It was an offering that the Israelites made in faith confident that the rest of the harvest would follow.

Similarly God's gift of the Spirit at the commencement of the believer's Christian life is His pledge that He will complete the process of salvation. Even though He has redeemed and adopted us there is more of redemption and adoption for us to experience in the future (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 John 3:2). When will that take place? It will happen at the Rapture when He glorifies our bodies by making them immortal (Phil. 3:20-21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44; John 14:1-2). The judgment seat of Christ will follow when we will receive more of our glorious inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

- 8:24-25 In the meantime we should look forward with hope to what God has promised and patiently endure present sufferings (cf. 5:4).

"The point of these two verses is that the attitude of hope, so distinctive of the Christian, implies that there is more in store for him than anything that is his already."²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶Sanday and Headlam, p. 210.

4. Our place in God's sovereign plan 8:26-30

In the foregoing verses Paul spoke of God's plan for creation and the believer. In these verses he showed how central a place His children occupy in the plan He is bringing to completion in history.

8:26 Hope helps us in our sufferings (vv. 24-25) and so does the Holy Spirit. The context suggests that our "weakness" probably refers to all our limitations as creatures (cf. v. 23; 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

The NASB translators understood Paul to be saying, "We do not know how to pray as we should," which implies ignorance concerning the proper method and procedure in prayer. The NIV translators thought he meant, "We do not know what we ought to pray for," implying ignorance regarding the content and subjects of our praying. The Greek text permits either interpretation, though it favors the former interpretation. Jesus gave instruction to His disciples about both content and method (Matt. 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4).

Perhaps what Paul meant was this. We know how to approach God in prayer and the general subjects that we should pray about. Still we struggle with exactly how to pray most effectively and with exactly what to pray. The basic principle of effective praying is that it must be in harmony with the will of God to be effective (1 John 5:14-15; John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23-24).²⁶⁷ However what the will of God is is often hard for us to ascertain. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid by interceding for us (cf. Luke 10:40).²⁶⁸ "Intercede" means to pray for someone else. "Groanings" or "groans" expresses feelings of compassion for our weak condition. The Holy Spirit requests the Father's help for us with deep compassion (cf. Eph. 6:18).

We should not confuse these "groanings" with praying in tongues. This passage promises all Christians God's help, not just those who had the gift of tongues. Furthermore the Scriptures never connect the gift of tongues with intercessory prayer. This verse seems to be saying that the Holy Spirit prays *for* us, not that He prays *through* us to the Father.

"I take it that Paul is saying, then, that our failure to know God's will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and assuredly is met by God's Spirit, who himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God. When we do not know what to pray for—yes, even when we pray for things that

²⁶⁷See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 175-76.

²⁶⁸Luke 10:40 is the only other place in the New Testament where this verb translated "intercedes" appears.

are not best for us—we need not despair, for we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession 'on our behalf.'"²⁶⁹

8:27 The Father understands the Spirit's intercession for the saints even though we do not hear it. We can know that His intercession is effective in securing God's help for us because the Spirit prays in harmony with God's will.

Thus God Himself by the Spirit comes to our aid whenever we need help. He also assures us in His Word that we will get assistance from the Father. The consequence of this promise should be that when we feel frustrated about our inability to pray about a particular need we can relax. We can have confidence that our compassionate God understands just how we feel and what we want, and He will respond according to His will.²⁷⁰

8:28 "We have been dealing in the first part of the chapter with the human will and its consent to walk by the Spirit. Not so from the 28th verse to the chapter's end. It will be *all God* from now on!"²⁷¹

Different translators have interpreted this verse in different ways too. Some saw "God" as the subject and have translated it "God causes . . ." (NASB). Others believed that "all things" is the subject and rendered it "all things God works . . ." (NIV). However the differences are not significant. The whole chapter, even all of Scripture, presents God as sovereign over all the affairs of life. Consequently we know what Paul meant. God orders all the events of life, not just the intercession of the indwelling Spirit, so they culminate in the blessing of His children (cf. vv. 26-27).

"All things" means just that, all things. In the context these things include the adversities the believer experiences. The "good" is what is good from God's perspective, and in view of verses 18-27, conformity to the Son of God is particularly prominent (v. 29). Those who love God could be a group of believers who love God more than others. However since Paul described them from the divine side as the elect of God, those who love God must refer to all Christians (cf. 1 John 4:19). This is the only place in Romans where Paul wrote of the believer's love for God; everywhere else he referred to God's love for the believer.

²⁶⁹Moo, p. 526.

²⁷⁰See Curtis C. Mitchell, "The Holy Spirit's Intercessory Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:555 (July-September 1982):230-42.

²⁷¹Newell, p. 330.

This verse does not say that God causes all things, period. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that God causes sin or evil. He permits these things, but that is much different from initiating them. Therefore when tragedy touches a believer we should not conclude that this is one of the "all things" that God causes. Rather this verse says that God brings good out of all things, even tragedies, for the Christian. The causes of tragedy are Satan, the sinful choices of people, and the consequences of living in a sinful world (cf. James 1:13-14).

8:29 Paul next explained God's calling in terms of His foreknowledge and predestination. It is a mistake to conclude that God knew beforehand who would believe on His Son and then predestined those individuals for salvation. Foreknowledge is a term that specifically describes God's decision to elect (cf. ch. 9; 1 Pet. 1:20). Notice that it is only those whom He foreknows that He predestines, not everyone. This indicates a "limited" foreknowledge, not just general knowledge of everyone and everything. Foreknowledge does not mean simply knowledge that precedes an event.²⁷² The reason for that choice was not human merit (Eph. 1:4) or even the faith of the elect but God's love and purpose (v. 28; cf. Deut. 7:6-8).

"Theologians rightly point out that prior to knowledge must be the divine decree. Unless God determines in some sense that something will happen, he cannot 'know' that it will. For God to foreknow requires an earlier decree."²⁷³

Predestined means that God determined the destiny of the elect before Creation (Eph. 1:3-4). That destiny is specifically conformity to Jesus Christ's image, much more than just deliverance from sin and death. God accomplished this goal partially through believers' justification. He is presently accomplishing it partially through our progressive sanctification, and He will accomplish it completely through our glorification.

"This blessed hope—that believers will be conformed to the image of His own Son—explains God's dealings with them as His chosen sons in this present age. He is ever at work to reproduce the moral image of Christ in them. All that now comes into their lives He uses for their good to further that glorious goal. His aim for them now is not to make them happy, materially prosperous, or famous, but to make them Christlike. He now uses 'all things,' the sad as well as the glad, the painful as well as the pleasant, the

²⁷²If God knows that something will happen before it does, He is in some sense responsible for making it happen since He is sovereign (cf. 11:2; Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2). Yet, as mentioned above, the Bible does not regard Him as the direct cause of all that happens.

²⁷³Mounce, pp. 188-89.

things that perplex and disappoint as well as the things they eagerly strive and pray for, to further His eternal purpose for them. In His infinite wisdom He knows what is needed to bring about that transformation. For some of His own He may need to use hotter fire and strike with harder blows than in His dealings with others to effect the formation of Christ's image in them. This may be because some believers may be more resistant to His moulding activities or are more prone to insist on their own efforts."²⁷⁴

The Son became as we are (v. 3) so that we could become as He is. In this respect we are brothers of Jesus Christ. "First-born" refers to Jesus Christ's relation to resurrection (cf. Col. 1:15), the event that inaugurated His entrance into the glorified state that we will share with Him eventually.

"This distinctive designation of Jesus Christ expresses His position of priority to and preeminence over all the other members of the family."²⁷⁵

8:30

Paul summarized the steps involved in our realization of God's purpose: calling, justification, and glorification. Though glorification is yet future the apostle spoke of it here as past. He could do so not because it has already happened but because it is so certain to take place that it is as good as having happened already (cf. Isa. 53). Probably Paul left sanctification out of this list because it is the one stage of our salvation in which human cooperation is essential. Paul listed only those things that God does by Himself to stress His sovereign working to bring the believer to His goal.

"The argument, when condensed, comes to this: that the very ones He foreknew, these, without the loss of one, He glorified."²⁷⁶

"Bridging the gap between predestination and justification by faith, God's effectual call brings the elect to salvation. This effectual call consists of a divine summons to salvation along with illumination, through which the elect rightly perceive the gospel and inevitably trust in Jesus Christ."²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴D. Edmond Hiebert, "Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):182.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 183.

²⁷⁶Stifler, p. 149.

²⁷⁷Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):218.

"God's intention, Paul emphasizes, is to bring to glory every person who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Our assurance of ultimate victory rests on this promise of God to us."²⁷⁸

5. Our eternal security 8:31-39

The apostle developed the fact that God will not lose one whom He has foreknown in this climactic section, and he gloried in this great truth.

"Nowhere in the annals of sacred literature do we find anything to match the power and beauty of this remarkable paean of praise."²⁷⁹

"This whole passage . . . strikes all thoughtful interpreters and readers, as transcending almost every thing in language . . ."²⁸⁰

". . . God's, or Christ's, love is the motif of this paragraph, mentioned three times (vv. 35, 37, 39; cf. Rom. 5:5-8)."²⁸¹

- 8:31 The key to the believer's security is that, "God is for us." What He has done for us through His Son in the past and what He is doing for us through the Spirit in the present should give us confidence. He will certainly complete His work of salvation by glorifying us in the future (cf. Phil. 1:3). Nobody or nothing can stand in His way.
- 8:32 God's plan for us cost Him dearly. He did not spare His own Son (cf. Gen. 22). Having made the greatest possible sacrifice for us already we can know that He will also do whatever else may be necessary to conform us to the image of His Son (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3).

"If you buy a costly watch at the jeweller's, he sends it to you in a lovely case which he gives you freely—with your purchase. . . . For 'all things' of this created universe,—yea, even all gifts or blessings God may give us, here or hereafter, are but nothing, compared with *Christ!*"²⁸²

"Romans 5:8-10 and 8:32 appear to me to be unanswerable texts for those who deny the scriptural teaching of Christ's substitutionary atonement. These passages state plainly that, if Jesus gave Himself for us in atonement, everything

²⁷⁸Moo, p. 536.

²⁷⁹Mounce, p. 173.

²⁸⁰R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1163.

²⁸¹Moo, p. 539.

²⁸²Newell, p. 337.

else must follow because, having done the most that He could do in dying as our substitute, the lesser things—such as conviction of sin, repentance, effectual grace, faith—must inevitably follow. God's great eternal purpose, expressed so beautifully in 8:28-30, must reach its fruition in glorification for all those for whom He died."²⁸³

8:33 The question that opens this verse, along with the two others that follow in verses 34 and 35, brings out the implications of "If God is for us, who is against us?" (v. 31).

Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10; cf. Job 1—2). He charges the elect with sin. However, he gets nowhere with God because all sin is against God ultimately (Ps. 51:4). Therefore God is the only one in the position to charge the believer with guilt. He will not do so because He is for us. He has provided His Son to pay the penalty for our sins, and He has already declared us righteous.

8:34 Jesus Christ is God's appointed judge who will condemn the unrighteous (Acts 17:31), but He will not condemn the elect. Paul cited four reasons. First, He died for us and thereby removed our guilt. Second, He arose from the dead and is therefore able to give life to those who trust Him (cf. John 1:25; 14:19). Third, He has ascended to the position of supreme authority in heaven where He represents us (v. 29).²⁸⁴ Fourth, He presently intercedes to the Father for our welfare (Heb. 4:4-16; 7:25; cf. Rom. 8:26).

8:35 Present trials and sufferings are no indication that God has withdrawn His love from us. Even though the Father allowed His Son to suffer He did not stop loving Him. The Father deals with His adopted sons as He dealt with His unique Son (cf. John 16:33).

8:36 Suffering has always been the portion of the righteous (Ps. 44:22). The sufferings in view are the consequence of our identification with Christ (cf. Acts 5:41; 1 Pet. 2:21-25; 4:14-19).

8:37 Verses 37-39 express very eloquently the impregnability of our position as believers. The Greek word *hypernikomen* suggests "hyper-conquerors." Our victory is sure! The Cross is the great proof of God's love for us, and it is the basis for our victory. It proves that God is for us (v. 31).

²⁸³S. Lewis Johnson, "Behold the Lamb: The Gospel and Substitutionary Atonement," in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 134.

²⁸⁴The fact that Jesus Christ now rules over the church does not mean that He is ruling on the throne of David over the kingdom of David. See Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March):81-82.

8:38 God will continue to love us when we die, and He will continue to love us whatever may befall us now. He loves us on both sides of the grave. Helpful or hostile angelic beings cannot change God's commitment to us. Nothing that the present or future may hold can do so either. No force of any kind can remove us from His loving care.

8:39 Space cannot separate us from His loving care either. Finally nothing in all creation can drive a wedge between the loving God and His redeemed people. That must include the behavior and belief of His own children as well. Not even the redeemed can remove themselves from God's love in Christ Jesus!²⁸⁵

Someone might contend that even though God will never stop loving us He may withdraw salvation from us if we do not keep loving and obeying Him (cf. Jude 21). However such a statement reflects failure to appreciate the full significance of God's love for the believer. His love involves a commitment to finish the good work that He has begun in us. God has revealed all of Romans 6—8 to help us appreciate this fact. Furthermore the nature of our salvation argues against this view. Salvation is a gracious work of God for us. The fact that we have responsibilities in our progressive sanctification does not mean we have to keep ourselves saved. Our sanctification is only a small part of our total salvation. Sinful behavior cannot separate a believer from his salvation any more than sinful conduct can separate a beloved child from his relationship to his loving Father.

Paul's peon of praise concludes this section of the epistle that expounds God's present work of salvation in and for those He has redeemed (chs. 6—8).

"Nowhere has the feeling of St. Paul been displayed in such overflowing measure, and yet the thread of logical deduction is not broken for an instant. This passage sums up, as we have seen, all that Paul has hitherto expounded in this Epistle."²⁸⁶

"The results of justification are thus fully presented (chapters 5 to 8). No one has ever set them forth so compactly and so profoundly, in a way that is so stimulating, effective, and uplifting."²⁸⁷

V. THE VINDICATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS CHS. 9—11

A major problem concerning God's righteousness arises out of what Paul just claimed for God. It is this. If God is for His elect and will never remove His love from them, why has

²⁸⁵See Robert G. Gromacki, *Salvation Is Forever*, p. 72.

²⁸⁶Godet, p. 335.

²⁸⁷Lenski, p. 578.

He set aside His chosen people, the Jews? It certainly looks as though something separated them from His love. If God has turned away from Israel, are Christians really that secure? The problem focuses on God's righteous dealings with humankind and therefore was one that Paul needed to deal with in this epistle.

In chapters 9—11 the apostle defended the righteousness of God in His dealings with Israel. Having explained how God justifies sinners Paul now found it necessary to justify God Himself, to prove and declare Him righteous.²⁸⁸ The apostle to the Gentiles proceeded to show that God had not removed His love from the Jews. Nothing had separated them from His love. God's present dealings with Israel do not indicate that He has abandoned them but need viewing in the light of His future plans for the nation. In the future God will also glorify Israel.

In chapter 9 Paul dealt primarily with God's dealings with Israel in the past, in chapter 10 with their present situation, and in chapter 11 with His future plans for the nation.

We note in these chapters that God's dealings with Israel as a nation are similar to His dealings with individual Christians whom Paul had been speaking of in recent chapters. God elected both Israel and each Christian.²⁸⁹ Unserved Israel, as many unserved individuals, tried to establish its own righteousness by obeying the law instead of by believing God's promise. A mass conversion of Israel will occur in the future (11:25-32). It is similar to the grand picture of the climax of salvation that we have in chapter 8. God will prove faithful to Israel as well as to individual Christians. The whole section dealing with Israel culminates in rapturous praise to God (11:33-36) as the section dealing with individual salvation did (8:31-39). While these parallels do exist, Paul did not stress them.

A. ISRAEL'S PAST ELECTION CH. 9

Paul began by tracing God's dealings with Israel in the past.

"No conjunction or particle connects the two chapters, and the tone shifts dramatically from celebration (8:31-39) to lamentation (9:1-3)."²⁹⁰

1. God's blessing on Israel 9:1-5

9:1 The apostle opened his discussion of God's relations with Israel very personally by sharing his heart for his own people. Some might have thought that Paul hated the Jews since he had departed from Judaism and now preached a Law-free gospel. Therefore he took pains to affirm his love for his fellow Jews. He claimed two witnesses that he was telling the

²⁸⁸The theological term that describes a vindication of God is theodicy.

²⁸⁹See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):25-40. Other texts that teach individual election are John 6:37, 44-45, 64-65; 10:26; Acts 13:48; 16:14; et al.

²⁹⁰Moo, p. 555.

truth when he professed love for the Jews. These witnesses were his own position in Christ who is the truth and his clear conscience that the Holy Spirit had sensitized.

- 9:2 Paul's sorrow and grief over Israel's condition contrast with his joy and exultation over his own condition (8:38-39).
- 9:3 "I could wish" introduces a wish that God would not possibly grant (8:35). Nevertheless it was a sincere wish. Paul had given up many other things for the salvation of others (Phil. 3:8). Moses voiced a similar self-sacrificing wish for the Israelites' salvation (Exod. 32:30-35). Paul's brethren here were not his spiritual but his racial brothers and sisters. Even though he was "the apostle to the Gentiles" he still took pleasure in being a Jew.
- 9:4 Paul shared much in common with his blood brothers. "Israelites" connotes the chosen people of God whereas "Jews" simply distinguishes them from Gentiles. Here the apostle pointed out further advantages of the Jews (cf. 3:2). He named eight of their special blessings in verses 4 and 5.

God graciously had adopted Israel as He had Christians (cf. 8:15; Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1-12). The Israelites had the glory of God's presence among them as Christians have the glory of God within us through His indwelling Spirit (Exod. 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11). God took the initiative in reaching out to Israel with covenants that bound Him and the nation together (i.e., the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants). He has reached out to us with the gospel and the New Covenant with the same result. The "giving" (NASB; not "receiving," NIV) of the Mosaic Law was a great privilege that corresponds to the teaching of Christ. The Jewish sacrificial system enabled Israel to have fellowship with God now available through the high priestly work of Christ. The promises revealed to the patriarchs guaranteed God's action for them just as God's promises to Christians guarantee His action for us (8:31).

"He also gave them His Law to govern their political, social, and religious life, and to guarantee His blessing if they obeyed."²⁹¹

- 9:5 The patriarchs were the fathers to whom God gave the promises before Israel was a nation. In this respect they correspond to the apostles in the church.

"The meaning and extent of these promises are the linchpin in Paul's interpretation of salvation history; see 9:6b-13;

²⁹¹Wiersbe, 1:543.

11:15; and especially 11:28, which forms with this verse an 'inclusio' surrounding Paul's discussion in these chapters."²⁹²

The Messiah came from Israel, though He was not exclusively theirs since He is the sovereign eternally blessed God (John 1:1). Here Paul called Jesus "God" (cf. Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:2).

Paul did not explicitly compare Israel's blessings and ours, which comparisons I have pointed out above. His point was simply that God had blessed Israel greatly. Obviously even though God had blessed the Israelites greatly their blessings did not exceed those of Christians today. The writer of the Book of Hebrews argued that God's blessings of Christians under the New Covenant surpass His blessings of Israelites under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant.

2. God's election of Israel 9:6-13

Paul's train of thought unfolds as follows in these verses. Because God's election of Israel did not depend on natural descent (vv. 6-10) or human merit (vv. 11-14), Israel's disobedience cannot nullify God's sovereign purpose for the nation.

9:6 The word of God that was in Paul's mind was evidently God's revelation of His plans for Israel in the Old Testament. God revealed that He had chosen Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:5-6). The Israelites were to function as priests in the world by bringing the nations to God (cf. Isa. 42:6). They were to do this by demonstrating through their life in the Holy Land how glorious it can be to live under the government of God. Israel had failed to carry out God's purpose for her thus far and consequently had suffered His discipline. It looked as though the word that God had spoken concerning Israel's purpose had failed. The Greek word translated "failed" (*ekpeptoken*) means "gone off its course" as a ship. Paul proceeded to show that God would accomplish His purpose for Israel in the rest of chapters 9—11.

". . . Romans 9—11 contains 11 occurrences of the term 'Israel,' and in every case it refers to ethnic, or national, Israel. Never does the term include Gentiles within its meaning. The NT use of the term is identical with the Pauline sense in this section."²⁹³

"Premillennialists deny that the NT authors spiritualize, or reinterpret, OT texts. That is really the focus, it seems to me. Does the NT, for example, apply OT promises made to

²⁹²Moo, pp. 564-65.

²⁹³S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Evidence from Romans 9—11," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 203.

ethnic believing Israel to the NT church (cf. Acts 15:13-18; Gal. 6:16)?"²⁹⁴

Even though all the descendants of Israel (Jacob) constitute the nation of Israel as Scripture speaks of Israel, God spoke of Israel in a more restricted sense as well. Paul had previously pointed out this distinction between the outward Jew and the inward Jew (2:28-29).²⁹⁵

9:7 Even though God promised to bless Abraham's descendants it was only one branch of his family that He singled out for special blessing. God's special elective purpose applied only to Isaac and his line of descendants.

9:8 It was not all the natural children of Abraham that God had in mind when He spoke of blessing Abraham's seed uniquely. It was only the children born supernaturally in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham about seed that He was speaking, namely Isaac's descendants.

"What counts is grace, not race."²⁹⁶

9:9 God did not choose to bless Isaac after his birth only because he was Abraham's son. Rather He promised Abraham before Isaac's birth that He would provide and bless a son for the patriarch supernaturally. His unusual birth confirmed God's choice of Isaac, as the channel of special blessing, to his parents.

9:10-12 God's special election of one portion of Abraham's descendants for special blessing is further evident in His choice of Jacob rather than Esau. Someone might say that Isaac was obviously the natural son through whom blessing would come since he was the first son born to Abraham and Sarah. That was not true of Jacob. Furthermore Esau and Jacob both had the same mother as well as father, so that was not a factor as an objector might claim it was in Isaac and Ishmael's case. Jacob and Esau might have shared the firstborn privilege since they were twins. One conception produced both of them. However, God chose Jacob even though Rebekah bore Esau before Jacob. As in the case of Isaac, God made a choice between them before their birth. Their birth was also supernatural since their mother was barren. God chose Jacob before he had done any deeds or manifested a character worthy of God's special blessing. The fact that Jacob became a less admirable person in some respects than Esau shows that God's choice was not due to Jacob but to Himself.

²⁹⁴Ibid., p. 206.

²⁹⁵Non-dispensationalists, who believe that the church replaces Israel in God's program, frequently appeal to verse 6 for support. They take the first "Israel" here as the "new Israel," the church, and the second "Israel" as old Israel. For further refutation of this interpretation, see Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 195-98.

²⁹⁶N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 238.

"Surely, if Paul had assumed that faith was the basis for God's election, he would have pointed this out when he raised the question in v. 14 about the fairness of God's election. All he would have needed to say at that point was 'of course God is not unjust in choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau, for his choosing took into account the faith of one and the unbelief of the other.'"²⁹⁷

9:13 By quoting Malachi 1:2-3 Paul raised his discussion from the level of personal election to national election. Malachi was speaking of nations, as the context of this Malachi quotation shows. Paul's point was that God does not wait until He sees how individuals or nations develop and what choices they make before He elects them. God chose Jacob and the nation of Israel for reasons that lay within Himself, not because they merited election (cf. Deut 7:6-8). This is a powerful refutation of the idea that election results from prior knowledge, that God chooses a person for salvation having foreseen that he or she will believe the gospel.

"The connection of this quotation with v. 12 suggests that God's love is the same as his election: God chose Jacob to inherit the blessings promised first to Abraham. . . . If God's love of Jacob consists in his choosing Jacob to be the 'seed' who would inherit the blessings promised to Abraham, then God's hatred of Esau is best understood to refer to God's decision not to bestow this privilege on Esau. It might best be translated 'reject.' 'Love' and 'hate' are not here, then, emotions that God feels but actions that he carries out."²⁹⁸

"As to 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,' a woman once said to Mr. Spurgeon, 'I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.' 'That,' Spurgeon replied, 'is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob!'"²⁹⁹

"The strong contrast is a Semitic idiom that heightens the comparison by stating it in absolute terms."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷Moo, p. 583.

²⁹⁸Ibid., p. 587.

²⁹⁹Newell, p. 364.

³⁰⁰Mounce, p. 199.

In verses 6-13 Paul established that Israel was the object of God's choice for special blessing because of His own gracious will. He did not choose Israel because of the Israelites' natural descent from Abraham or because of their superior qualities.

3. God's freedom to elect 9:14-18

The question of fairness arises whenever someone makes a choice to favor one person over another. Paul dealt with the justice of God in doing what He did in this pericope.

"These verses are a detour from the main road of Paul's argument. Paul takes this detour because he knows that his insistence on God's initiative in determining who should be saved and who rejected (see vv. 10-13 especially) will meet with questions and even objections. Appropriately, therefore, Paul reverts to the diatribe style, with its question-and-answer format and references to a dialogue partner, that he has utilized earlier in the letter (see 2:1—3:8; 3:27-31; 6—7)."³⁰¹

9:14 The apostle first flatly denied the charge that God is unjust. God cannot be unjust because He is God.

9:15 Then he proceeded to refute the charge. When the whole nation of Israel rebelled against God by worshipping the golden calf (Exod. 33), God took the lives of only 3,000 of the rebels. He could have justly slain the whole nation. His mercy caused Him to do something that appeared to be unjust. Likewise in His dealings with Jacob and Esau God blessed Esau greatly as a descendant of Abraham as He did all of Abraham's descendants. Nevertheless He chose to bestow special grace on Jacob.

"The *grace* of God has been spoken of in this Epistle often before; but not until these chapters is *mercy* named; and until mercy is understood, grace cannot be fully appreciated."³⁰²

9:16 It is not man's desire or effort that causes God to be merciful but His own sovereign choice. God is under no obligation to show mercy or to extend grace to anyone. If we insist on receiving just treatment from God, what we will get is condemnation (3:23).

9:17 God said He raised Pharaoh up. God had mercifully spared Pharaoh up to the moment when He said these words to him, through six plagues and in spite of his consistent opposition to God. God did not mean that He had created Pharaoh and allowed him to sit on Egypt's throne, though He had done that too. This is clear from Exodus 9:16, which Paul quoted. The

³⁰¹Moo, pp. 549-50.

³⁰²Newell, p. 355.

NASB translation makes this clear by translating Exodus 9:16, "... for this cause I have allowed you to remain." Pharaoh deserved death for his opposition and insolence. However, God would not take his life in the remaining plagues so his continuing opposition and God's victory over him would result in greater glory for God (cf. Josh. 9:9; Ps. 76:10).

Here is another example similar to the one in verse 15 of God not giving people what they deserve but extending mercy to them instead.

9:18 This statement summarizes Paul's point. In chapter 1 the apostle had spoken about the way God gives people over to their own evil desires as a form of punishment for their sins. This is how God hardens people's hearts. In Pharaoh's case we see this working out clearly. God was not unjust because He allowed the hardening process to continue. His justice demanded punishment.

"Neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself."³⁰³

". . . we say boldly, that a believer's heart is not fully yielded to God until it accepts without question, and without demanding softening, this eighteenth verse."³⁰⁴

"God's hardening, then, is an action that renders a person insensitive to God and his word and that, if not reversed, culminates in eternal damnation."³⁰⁵

"God's hardening does not, then, *cause* spiritual insensitivity to the things of God; it maintains people in the state of sin that already characterizes them."³⁰⁶

Paul did not mention the fact that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, which Moses stated in Exodus. Paul's point was simply that God can freely and justly extend mercy or not extend mercy to those who deserve His judgment.

4. God's mercy toward Israel 9:19-29

Next Paul dealt with a question that rises out of what he had just argued for, namely God's freedom to extend mercy to whom He will. Is it not logical that if God is going to show mercy to whom He will in spite of human actions and merit that human actions

³⁰³Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 361.

³⁰⁴Newell, p. 369.

³⁰⁵Moo, p. 597.

³⁰⁶Ibid., p. 599.

really provide no basis for His judging us? Is not the basis of judgment really God's will rather than human actions?

9:19 Paul posed the question in this verse and then answered it in the verses that follow.

9:20 In the first place it is presumptuous for human beings as the objects of divine judgment to sit in judgment on their Judge. Judging is God's prerogative, not ours. Creatures have no right to complain about their Creator's behavior.

". . . men are not lost because they are hardened; they are hardened because they are lost; they are lost because they are sinners."³⁰⁷

9:21 The illustration in this verse clarifies the inappropriateness of this critical attitude. Clearly Israel is in view as the vessel in the illustration (cf. Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:6). Israel had no right to criticize God for shaping her for a particular purpose of His own choosing. Really Israel had nothing to complain about since God had formed her for an honorable use. Obviously the same is true of individuals.

"Neither Moses, nor Pharaoh, nor anyone else, could choose his parents, his genetic structure, or his time and place of birth. We have to believe that these matters are in the hands of God."³⁰⁸

9:22 People prepare themselves for destruction by pursuing sin (ch. 1). Pharaoh was such a vessel of wrath. However, Paul had in mind those in Israel who had opposed the gospel in his day. God was patient and merciful with them allowing them time to change their minds (repent) and believe (cf. 2:3-4; Acts 2:38; 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 3:9).

9:23-24 Those who believe the gospel are those in whom God will display the riches of His glory, not His wrath.

"Paul teaches that God has brought upon certain people whom he chooses on the basis of nothing but his own will a condition of spiritual stupor, a condition that leads to eternal condemnation."³⁰⁹

These vessels include both Jews and Gentiles (cf. 1:16; 2:10-11; 3:22).

³⁰⁷Newell, p. 371.

³⁰⁸Wiersbe, 1:545.

³⁰⁹Moo, p. 609.

- 9:25-26 The inclusion of Gentiles in this group is in harmony with Old Testament prophecy. Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 in their contexts refer to a reversal of Israel's status. Some interpreters say that this is a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.³¹⁰ Others claim that this was an initial partial fulfillment that does not eliminate a future complete fulfillment.³¹¹ A better explanation, I think, is that Paul saw an analogy between God's present calling of Gentiles and His future calling of Israel.³¹² Gentiles were not a distinct people as were the Jews but constituted the mass of humanity. Nevertheless by God's grace believing Gentiles became members of the new people of God, the church.
- 9:27-28 Israel's election as a nation did not preclude God's judgment of the unbelievers in it. His mercy and faithfulness are observable in His sparing a remnant. Isaiah 10:22-23 anticipated the depletion of Israel through Sennacherib's invasion. That was God's instrument of judgment. When Paul wrote, the believing remnant of Israel was within the church as it is today.
- 9:29 If God had not tempered His judgment with mercy He would have destroyed Israel as completely as He had Sodom and Gomorrah. The remnant of believers among the mass of racial Jews is proof of God's mercy to the children of Israel.

5. God's mercy toward the Gentiles 9:30-33

This short pericope concludes Paul's argument concerning Israel's past election and begins the train of thought that he continued in chapter 10. The use of "righteousness" ten times in 9:30—10:21 illustrates the unity of this section and identifies a major theme in it.

- 9:30-31 Paul's question, that often marks a new argument in Romans, introduced his concluding summary that he couched in terminology suggestive of a foot race. Israel struggled hard to obtain the prize of justification but crossed the finish line behind Gentiles who were not running that hard. Israel as a whole hoped to gain justification by doing good works, but believing Gentiles obtained the prize by believing the gospel.

³¹⁰McClain, p. 183; John A. Battle, Jr., "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:25-26," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981):115-29.

³¹¹Darrell L. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, pp. 37-67; W. Edward Glenny, "The Israel Imagery of 1 Peter 2," in *ibid.*, pp. 156-87; *idem*, "The 'People of God' in Romans 9:25-26," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (January-March 1995):42-59.

³¹²Johnson, "Evidence from . . .," p. 209-11; Witmer, p. 478-79.

"Hardly a passage in the New Testament is stronger than this one in its exposure of the futility of works as a means of justification."³¹³

9:32-23 Israel as a whole, excluding the believing remnant, failed to gain a righteous standing before God because she tried to win it with works. A stone on the race track over which she stumbled impeded her progress. Intent on winning in her own effort Israel failed to recognize the Stone prophesied in Scripture who was to provide salvation for her.

The quotation is from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:6-8). God intended the Messiah to be the provider of salvation. However the Jews did not allow Him to fulfill this function for them. Consequently this Stone became a stumbling block for them (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23).

Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ did not make God unfaithful or unrighteous in His dealings with the nation. What it did do was make it possible for Gentiles to surpass the Jews as the main recipients of salvation.

B. ISRAEL'S PRESENT REJECTION CH. 10

The chapter division signals a shift in Paul's emphasis from God's dealings with Israel in the past, namely before Christ's death, to His dealings with them in the present.

1. The reason God has set Israel aside 10:1-7

The reason for Israel's failure mentioned in 9:32-33, namely her rejection of Christ, led Paul to amplify that subject further in this section.

10:1 This pericope opens with Paul returning to his feelings of compassionate concern for his fellow Israelites' salvation (9:1-3). Mention of their deliberate rejection of Christ (9:32-33) evidently triggered this emotional expression.

"The reality of his love is seen in the fact that he prayed for them."³¹⁴

10:2 Ironically it was Israel's zeal that set her up for failure. Zeal also characterized Paul's life, which in many ways duplicated Israel's experience as a nation. It kept him from believing on Christ too (cf. Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14). Paul and Israel both had zeal for God, but it was zeal that lacked knowledge, knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah (1 Tim. 1:13).

³¹³Harrison, p. 109.

³¹⁴Mounce, pp. 206-7.

10:3 The Jews were ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God as a gift (1:17). They sought to earn righteousness by keeping the Law. Instead they should have humbly received the gift of righteousness that God gives to those who believe on His Son (cf. Phil. 3:9).

"The Law was designed not to bring about self-righteousness or self-hope, but contrariwise, self-despair."³¹⁵

10:4 The Greek word *telos* and its English equivalent "end" can refer either to termination (as in "the end of the matter") or to purpose (as in "to the end that"). Paul believed that Jesus Christ was the end of the Mosaic Law in both respects. He spoke of the Law as having a function to fulfill in history after which Jesus Christ terminated it (7:6; Gal. 3:19, 23; cf. Mark 7:18-19; Luke 16:16; John 1:17; Acts 10:12; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 4:9-11; 5:1; Col. 2:17; Heb. 7:12; 9:10). Furthermore he described the purpose of the Law as bringing people to Christ (7:7-13; Gal. 3:24; cf. Matt. 5:17).

"In the progress of salvation history the beginning of the end of the role of law is in the coming of Christ. Its end is based on the work he effected and applied to the church he established."³¹⁶

In the verse before us Paul evidently meant that the Mosaic Law ended when Jesus Christ died. The support for this view is that Paul had just been contrasting, in 9:30-33, the Law with the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. The Jews incorrectly imagined that the Law was a means of justification, but when Jesus Christ came He provided the real means of justification. Paul did not mean that the Law was at one time a means of justification that ended when Jesus Christ died. The Jews only thought of the Law as a means of obtaining righteousness. It is that supposed function of the Law to justify that ends for "everyone who believes" in Christ.

God gave the Mosaic Law for two purposes primarily. One purpose was to reveal the character and standards of a holy God. Consequently man would recognize his inability to be good enough to earn acceptance by God and so look to God for salvation (7:13, Gal. 3:24). The second purpose was to regulate the moral, religious, and civil life of the children of Israel (Deut. 4:1). God never intended it to provide eternal salvation for the Israelites (3:20). He did not give it for a redemptive purpose. God has preserved the Mosaic Law in Scripture for Christians because of its

³¹⁵Newell, p. 389.

³¹⁶David K. Lowery, "Christ, the End of the Law in Romans 10:4," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 246.

revelatory value. He never intended Christians to regulate their lives by its precepts.

"It is because Reformed theology has kept us Gentiles under the Law,—if not as a means of righteousness, then as 'a rule of life,' that all the trouble has arisen. *The Law is no more a rule of life than it is a means of righteousness.*"³¹⁷

God has terminated the whole Mosaic Law. It is one unified code (cf. 7:6). God wants Christians to observe nine of the Ten Commandments because they are part of the Law of Christ. This is the regulatory code that God has given the church, namely the teachings of Christ and the apostles (Gal. 6:2).³¹⁸

10:5 Paul supported his contention that justification results from faith in Christ (v. 4) through verse 13. He used the Law (Lev. 18:5) to prove that Moses showed that it was futile to trust in law-keeping for salvation. Moses revealed that those who practiced the righteousness commanded in the Law would live (cf. Gal. 3:12). Here living means experiencing justification (cf. 2:13). However no one can keep the whole Law (3:19-20).

10:6-7 Positively Moses taught that justification came by faith (Deut. 30:11-14). In the context of Moses' statement there is a strong emphasis on an attitude of loving obedience rather than a legalistic approach to earning righteousness (Deut. 30:6-10). Moses' point was that the Israelites should not think that pleasing God was something beyond their reach. A proper attitude of faith toward God is essentially what He required.

In quoting this passage Paul made his own application of it in harmony with his argument. It was vain for the Israelites to think that they had to be good enough to ascend into heaven to bring the promised Messiah down to earth to save His people. Likewise it was foolish for them to think that they had to be good enough to raise Messiah up from the death that the prophets had predicted He would die. God had already done those things for the ungodly in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All they had to do was accept what God had done for them in Christ.

2. The remedy for rejection 10:8-15

10:8 Paul quoted Moses again (Deut. 30:14) to reaffirm the fact that the great lawgiver taught that salvation came by faith. The "word of faith" means

³¹⁷Newell, p. 393.

³¹⁸See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):227-33. For a good discussion of this verse, see Ping-Kuen Eric Li, "The Relationship of the Christian to the Law as Expressed in Romans 10:4" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991).

the message that righteousness comes by faith. Faith is easy compared to a lifetime of slavish obedience to the Law. Anyone can express it easily with the mouth and accept it easily with the heart.

10:9 The terms "mouth" and "heart," which have been a source of confusion in the interpretation of this verse, come from Moses' words that Paul quoted in the preceding verse. The statement quoted accounts for the unusual order of "confess" and then "believe" in this verse. The normal chronological order is that one believes and then acknowledges his or her belief (i.e., confesses; cf. 2 Cor. 4:13-14).

"Confess" means to say the same thing about something as someone else does (Gr. *homologeō*; cf. 1 John 1:9). In this context it refers to saying the same thing about Jesus Christ as other believers in Him do. It is an acknowledgment of one's faith in Christ. Obedient Christians in the early church made this confession verbally and in water baptism, as we do today (cf. Matt. 28:19-20).

In the early church the phrase "Jesus is Lord" was one of the most common and simple expressions by which believers confessed their faith in Christ (cf. Acts. 2:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:3; Phil. 2:11). It is a confession parallel and very similar to Israel's basic confession of faith in Yahweh: "Yahweh our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4, the *Shema*).

"Paul's statement in vv. 9, 10 is misunderstood when it is made to support the claim that one cannot be saved unless he makes Jesus the Lord of his life by a personal commitment. Such a commitment is most important [cf. 6:13-19; 12:1]; however, in this passage, Paul is speaking of the objective lordship of Christ, which is the very cornerstone for faith, something without which no one could be saved."³¹⁹

The fact that Jesus is Lord (God and Savior) became clear when He rose from the dead (cf. v. 7). Jesus' resurrection was the proof that He really was the divine Messiah. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ meant belief that Jesus is Lord. Paul was speaking of belief in His resurrection as an evidence of saving faith, not as a condition for salvation.

Jesus' resurrection was not part of His saving work. His death saved us (3:25). While the resurrection is part of the good news of salvation, the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3-4), belief in the resurrection of Christ is not a condition for salvation. A person could experience regeneration if he only

³¹⁹Harrison, p. 112. See also Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 70-73; idem, *Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 169-81; Roy B. Zuck, "Cheap Grace?" *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):4-7; Constable, "The Gospel . . .," p. 209.

knew and believed that Jesus Christ died for his sins without knowing of His resurrection. What if a person heard the gospel including the fact that Jesus arose from the dead and did not believe that Jesus arose? If he disbelieved in Jesus' resurrection because he did not believe Jesus Christ is whom He claimed to be, that person would not experience regeneration.

10:10 This verse summarizes the ideas in the previous verse in general terms. Paul frequently summarized in Romans, and often these summaries refer to the results of the action in view as here (cf. 4:25; 5:21; 6:23; 7:25).

Belief in Jesus Christ in one's heart results in acceptance by God (i.e., justification, imputed righteousness, and positional sanctification). Testimony to one's belief in Jesus Christ normally follows and normally is verbal. Paul was describing the normal consequence of belief.

In what sense does this confession result in salvation? Paul obviously did not mean that confession of Jesus Christ secures acceptance with God since he just said belief in the heart does that (v. 9; cf. ch. 4). Salvation is a broad term that includes many kinds of deliverance, as we have seen. What aspect of salvation does taking a public stand for Christ secure? For one thing it saves the person making the confession from the potential discipline of God.³²⁰ It also saves him or her from the loss of reward that those who are unwilling to identify themselves with Him will enjoy (cf. Matt. 10:32-33; 2 Tim. 2:12). Furthermore, it often results in the eternal salvation of other people who hear the confession of faith and then believe themselves.

10:11 Paul removed all doubt about the requirement for justification that his statement in verses 9-10 might have created with this quotation from Isaiah 28:16. Belief in God, specifically in His promises, is the only condition for justification (cf. 3:24-25). These promises are also the basis of the believer's assurance that he or she possesses salvation (cf. 1 John 5:12-13).

10:12 The blessing of justification is available to Jew and Gentile alike (cf. 3:22). Its source is the same Lord. This reference confirms the fact that "Lord" in verse 9 refers to Jesus as God rather than as personal master as does the next verse.

10:13 The "Lord" of Joel 2:32 is the same as the "Lord Jesus Christ." Peter also appealed to Joel 2:32 in his Pentecost sermon for the same reason Paul did here (Acts 2:21). Both apostles wanted to show that the door of salvation is open to everyone. When the elect call on God they are responding to His calling of them (8:28-30). The only prayer of an unbeliever that God

³²⁰See Dillow, pp. 122-24.

has promised to answer is this prayer for salvation, though He sometimes graciously answers other prayers that they pray.

Possibly Paul had a more restricted concept of salvation in mind in this verse.

"This verse (10:13) is a quotation from Joel 2:32 and refers to the physical deliverance from the future day of wrath upon the earth and the restoration of the Jews to Palestine and not deliverance from hell."³²¹

10:14-15 Paul turned from the responsibility to believe to the responsibility of the believer. "They" refers to the lost, particularly Israelites. Paul presented the logical sequence in a lost person's coming to faith in Jesus Christ in reverse order here. Faith depends on knowledge of facts. Someone has to proclaim these facts for others to know about them. "A preacher" (NASB) unfortunately implies an ordained minister, but Paul meant "someone preaching" (NIV).

Being sent (v. 15) suggests that those heralding the gospel operate under orders from a higher authority. This description also implies that that authority has given them their message. God has sent every Christian to proclaim the gospel to the lost (Matt. 28:19-20; John 20:21). Unfortunately many Christians are waiting for some special calling from God to go. They do not realize that God has already sent them. Where we go and to what segments of humanity we proclaim the gospel are secondary issues. If we get active proclaiming the gospel, God will direct us where He wants to use us (Ps. 37:23).

As is clear from Paul's quotation of Isaiah 52:7, the message is one of good news that brings joy to those who accept it. "How beautiful are the feet" is a figurative way of expressing gratitude for the obedience of the messengers who have brought good news. The context of Isaiah's words was the announcement of God's favor in restoring Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity.

3. The continuing unbelief of Israel 10:16-21

Even though the door of salvation is open to Jews as well as to Gentiles (vv. 8-15), the majority within Israel still refuse to believe in Jesus Christ.

10:16 In spite of the good news of Israel's restoration and the promises of Messiah's coming and deliverance, most of the Jews did not believe (cf. Isa. 53:1).

³²¹Ibid., p. 124.

10:17 This verse summarizes the thought of verses 14-16. The word "of" Christ could mean the word from Him, namely the message that He has sent us to proclaim (v. 15).³²² It could also refer to the message concerning Christ (v. 9). Both meanings could have been in Paul's mind. In either case the gospel is in view.

"What faith really is, in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is the inward conviction that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith."³²³

10:18 This rhetorical question suggests the possibility that Israel's rejection of her Messiah may have been due to a failure to get the message to the Jews (v. 14). However, Paul's quotation of Psalm 19:4 clarifies that they had heard. Every human being hears the testimony of nature, and all Israel had heard the special revelation of God concerning His Son from the prophets. They could not plead ignorance as a nation.

"But perhaps it would be simpler to think that Paul engages in hyperbole, using the language of the Psalm to assert that very many people by the time Paul writes Romans have had opportunity to hear. It cannot be lack of opportunity, then, that explains why so few Jews have come to experience the salvation God offers in Christ."³²⁴

10:19 Might there be a second possible reason for Israel's rejection of the gospel? Even though the Jews heard the message perhaps they did not understand it.

The quotation from Deuteronomy 32:21 comes from Moses' criticism of Israel for forsaking the Lord. God said that He would give Israel a desire to return to Himself (provoke her to jealousy) by blessing another people. This is what had happened since Jesus Christ had died. God had opened the door of the church to the Gentiles. This should have made Israel more desirous of returning to God, accepting His Messiah, and experiencing God's blessing. However this had not happened, as the record of the church's growth in Acts proves. As time went by, fewer and fewer Jews responded to the gospel whereas ever more Gentiles accepted it. This response was not due to ignorance but to deliberate rejection.

³²²Cranfield, 2:537.

³²³Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 31. Cf. pp. 37-43.

³²⁴Moo, p. 667.

- 10:20 Isaiah 65:1-2 supports Deuteronomy 32:21 with emphasis on the fact that the Gentiles came to God.
- 10:21 The Jews on the other hand refused to come to Him even when He reached out to draw them to Himself. The reason God has temporarily set them aside is their stubborn rebelliousness. Moses and the prophets warned Israel of this attitude repeatedly, but the Chosen People persisted in it even after God had provided their Messiah.

Chapter 10 deals with Israel's present rejection of Jesus Christ that has resulted in God's temporary rejection of her. Both rejections will change in the future as the next chapter explains.

C. ISRAEL'S FUTURE SALVATION CH. 11

In chapter 9 Paul glorified God's past grace in sovereignly electing Israel as a vessel that would honor Him in a special way in time and space. In chapter 10 he spoke of Israel's present refusal to respond to His provision of Jesus Christ. In chapter 11 he revealed God's future plans for the nation that, when unfolded, will fully vindicate His righteousness.

This chapter proves that God has a future for ethnic Israel, the racial descendants of Jacob. That future is distinct from the future of the church that true believers of both Jewish and Gentile races living now compose. Romans 11 not only vindicates God but dispensational theology. Covenant theology on the other hand argues that God will fulfill the promises concerning future blessing that He gave Israel in the church.³²⁵

"This chapter from the historical point of view is logically necessary. The Old Testament clearly promises Israel headship or leadership in the world's worship . . . Israel as a separate people is to be restored and to realize the promises made to them in the Old Testament."³²⁶

"The great historian Arnold Toynbee classified Israel as 'a fossil civilization' and did not know what to do with it. For some reason, the nation did not fit into his historical theories."³²⁷

1. Israel's rejection not total 11:1-10

The first pericope gives hope for the future by showing that even now some Jews believe.

- 11:1 The opening question carries on the rhetorical style of 10:18 and 19. God has not rejected the Israelites because they have, on the whole, rejected

³²⁵See Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 250-63, for a good presentation of Israel's future restoration in this chapter.

³²⁶Stiffler, p. 183.

³²⁷Wiersbe, 1:550.

Him. The proof of this is that Paul himself was a member of the believing remnant, a Christian Jew. Paul even came from the small and sometimes despised tribe of Benjamin (cf. Judg. 19—21) yet God had saved him.

- 11:2 The faith of Paul and other believing Jews, though few, proves that God has not completely rejected the people whom He had elected (foreknew, cf. 8:29).

In Elijah's day Israel's departure from God was widespread.

- 11:3-4 Elijah concluded that he was the only Israelite who had remained faithful to the Lord. God assured him that He had preserved other Israelites who constituted a believing remnant within the unfaithful nation.

"The very fact of God's choice excludes the possibility of his desertion of his own."³²⁸

- 11:5 Likewise in Paul's day and today there are believing Jews who constitute a remnant among the physical descendants of Jacob. By referring to God's gracious choice Paul focused on the real reason for the presence of a remnant.

- 11:6 The apostle elaborated the final thought of verse 5 here. It is the grace of God, not the works of the remnant that is the real cause of their condition. Believing Jews are not superior, just greatly blessed.

- 11:7 Verses 7-10 summarize the argument (v. 7) with supporting Old Testament quotations (vv. 8-10). Verse 7 ties back to 10:3.

The Greek word translated "hardened" (*eporothesan*) is not the same one Paul used in 9:18 (*sklerunei*). The one he used in 9:18 simply pictures a hardening. The one he used here describes hardening with the result that the hardness renders the person more difficult to get through to from then on. It is as though a callus built up over the Israelites that made them less sensitive to God.³²⁹

". . . God's hardening permanently binds people in the sin that they have chosen for themselves."³³⁰

"This postponement in Israelite history is not so much an interruption of redemption as an *extension* of predicted hardening (Rom. 11:7-10). The Exile, which was a

³²⁸Harrison, p. 117.

³²⁹H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 199-200.

³³⁰Moo, p. 681.

punishment for national disobedience, has therefore been prolonged during the present age until the appointed time for Israel's national (and spiritual) restoration (Acts 1:7; 3:21; Rom. 11:25-27)."³³¹

- 11:8 The quotation in this verse is a combination of Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. Paul used these passages to prove the following point. The Israelites did not follow God faithfully even though they saw God's miraculous deliverance from Egypt, experienced His preservation in the wilderness, and heard the warnings of the prophets. God gave them a spirit of stupor because they failed to respond to the numerous blessings that He bestowed on them.³³² A similar example would be a person losing his appetite for steak because he eats steak every day. This was apparently an instance of God giving them over to the natural consequences of their actions (1:24, 26, 28).
- 11:9-10 The Jews regarded Psalm 69 as Messianic in Paul's day (cf. John 15:25). The quotation from this psalm (vv. 22-23) records David's desire. He wished that his enemies' table (i.e., blessings) would become something that they would stumble over. The enemies in view were the Lord's enemies as well as the king's since he was the Lord's anointed. This is really what had happened to the Israelites who had set themselves against God by rejecting His Son. Inability to see clearly and bondage to the Law had resulted (cf. Act. 15:10). The Greek phrase *dia pantos* usually means "continually." It probably means that here rather than "forever."³³³ Paul would explain that Israel's obstinacy and bondage would not last indefinitely (v. 26). Paul explained that God had brought upon the Jews what David had prayed would happen to his persecutors.

Even though as a whole Israel had reaped the fruit of her own stubborn rebellion against God, God had called a remnant within the nation for salvation. The presence of this remnant shows that God has not cast off His chosen people completely or been unfaithful to His promises to them.

2. Israel's rejection not final 11:11-24

Now Paul put the remnant aside and dealt with Israel as a whole. Even while Israel resists God's plan centered in Messiah, the Lord is at work bringing Gentiles to salvation. Gentile salvation really depends on Israel's covenant relationship with God, as Paul illustrated with the olive tree. The salvation of Gentiles in the present age not only magnifies the grace of God, but it will also provoke Israel to jealousy and lead her ultimately to return to the Lord.

³³¹J. Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 136.

³³²A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:393.

³³³Cranfield, 2:552.

- 11:11 Another rhetorical question marks another advance in the movement of Paul's thought. The stumbling of Israel did not result in a hopeless fall (cf. 9:32-33; 11:9). God now deals with Gentiles on the same basis as Jews regarding their salvation because Israel as a whole rejected Jesus Christ. One reason God chose to do this was to make Israel jealous of the Gentiles as the recipients of God's blessings so Israel would turn back to God.
- 11:12 Paul here anticipated the national repentance of Israel that he articulated later (v. 26). God promised to bless the world through Israel (Gen. 12:1-3). How much more blessing will come to the world when Israel turns back to God than is coming to the world now while she is in rebellion against God!
- "While *pleroma* probably has a qualitative denotation—'fullness'—the context and the parallel with v. 25 suggest that this 'fullness' is attained through a numerical process. Paul would then be suggesting that the present 'defeat' of Israel, in which Israel is numerically reduced to a small remnant, will be reversed by the addition of far greater numbers of true believers: this will be Israel's destined 'fullness.'"³³⁴
- 11:13-14 Here Paul applied what he had said earlier to his own ministry. By evangelizing Gentiles Paul was causing more Jews to become jealous of God's blessings on Gentile converts. He was thereby playing a part in bringing some Jews to faith.
- "The Gentiles are not saved merely for their own sake, but for the sake of God's election of Israel."³³⁵
- "However strange it may sound, the way to salvation of Israel is by the mission to the Gentiles."³³⁶
- 11:15 When Israel returns to God and He accepts her, the results for all humankind are comparable to life from the dead (cf. Ezek. 37). God's blessings on humanity now will pale by comparison with what the world will experience then (i.e., during the Millennium).
- 11:16 The first piece of dough (firstfruits) describes the believing remnant in Israel now. The "lump" or "batch" refers to the whole nation. God has consecrated both groups to Himself.

³³⁴Moo, p. 690.

³³⁵James Daane, *The Freedom of God*, p. 145.

³³⁶Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, p. 301.

The root and branches must refer to the Abrahamic Covenant and the believing and unbelieving Gentiles and Jews in view of how Paul proceeded to develop this illustration in verses 17-24.³³⁷

11:17 The cultivated olive tree was a symbol of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament (Jer. 11:16-17; Hos. 14:4-6). The wild olive tree represents the Gentiles. The rich root of the cultivated tree corresponds to the Abrahamic Covenant from which all God's blessings and the very life of the nation sprang. We might add to the illustration by saying that the roots derive their nourishment from God Himself.

Note that Paul said that God grafted the Gentiles in among the Jews. They became partakers with the Jews of the blessings that come through the roots. Paul did not say that the Gentiles became part of Israel, only that they partake with Israel of the blessings of the root. This is a very important point. The olive tree is not the church in which God has united Jewish and Gentile believers in one body (Eph. 3:6). The wild olive branches retain their own identity as wild branches even though they benefit from blessings that come through Israel (e.g., the Messiah, the Scriptures, etc.).

11:18 Gentile believers should not feel superior to Jewish unbelievers, the branches that God has broken off (vv. 17, 19). Gentile believers might conclude that their salvation is what was responsible for the continuing existence of Israel (cf. v. 14). Really it is God's faithfulness in honoring the Abrahamic Covenant that is responsible for that.

11:19-20 It is true that one of the reasons Gentiles have become partakers of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant is that many of the Jews have not believed. However the Gentile believer who may feel superior to the unbelieving Jew needs to remember that the only reason he is where he is is because he has simply believed God. He is not there because he has done some meritorious work that would be a ground for boasting (cf. 5:2).

11:21 Throughout this whole discussion Paul was viewing Gentile believers and Jewish unbelievers as two groups. This fact is clear from his use of the singular "you" in the Greek text (*su*, vv. 17-24). If he had been speaking of individual believers, we might conclude that this verse provides some basis for believing that a believer can lose his salvation. Paul's point was, if God set aside Israel temporarily because of unbelief, He could do the same with Gentiles because of boasting.

³³⁷See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 286. Moo, p. 698, saw the root as the patriarchs and God's promises to them.

- 11:22 "Those who fell" are the unbelieving Jews, and "you" are the believing Gentiles. The positions are reversible. Gentiles can become objects of God's sternness, and Israel can become the object of His kindness. This depends on their responses to God. Their response determines whether God will spare them (v. 21) or cut them off (v. 22).
- 11:23 Belief is what resulted in God grafting in the Gentiles (v. 17), and belief could result in Him grafting in formerly unbelieving Israel. In the illustration the whole trunk of the cultivated olive tree represents Israel and the natural branches are the believing and unbelieving segments of it.
- 11:24 Here is another of Paul's "much more" comparisons (5:9, 19, 15, 17; cf. Luke 11:13). If God did the difficult thing, namely grafting wild branches onto cultivated stock, it should not be hard to believe that He will do the easier thing. The easier thing is restoring the pruned branches of the cultivated tree to their former position.

"The restoration of converted Jews to the Patriarchal communion must from the nature of the case be more natural than the conversion of the heathen."³³⁸

Obviously the branches broken off do not represent the same individuals as those grafted in in the future. They are Israelites who in the former case did not believe and in the latter case did. The grafting in of Israel will not involve the breaking off of Gentile believers in the future.

3. Israel's restoration assured 11:25-32

Paul previously laid the groundwork for this section. His point so far was that God is able to restore Israel. Now we learn that He is not only *able* to do it, but He *will* do it. This section is the climax of everything that Paul wrote in chapters 9—11.

"The same mercy that has overtaken the Gentiles who were formerly disobedient will finally overtake the now disobedient Israel."³³⁹

- 11:25 A "mystery" in the New Testament refers to a truth previously unknown but now revealed. That revelation in this case was that Israel's hardening is only temporary.

God's plan to put Israel aside temporarily should not make Gentile believers think too highly of themselves. God designed this plan to display His own glory.

³³⁸Liddon, p. 314.

³³⁹Harrison, p. 123.

The "fullness of the Gentiles" (NASB) refers to the "full number of the Gentiles" (NIV; cf. v. 12; Luke 21:23-24; Acts 15:14). When all the Gentiles whom God has chosen for salvation during the present age of Israel's rejection have experienced salvation, God will precipitate a revival of faith within Israel.

11:26 "The first clause of v. 26 is the storm center in the interpretation of Rom. 9—11 and of NT teaching about the Jews and their future."³⁴⁰

"All Israel" means Israel as a whole in contrast to the believing remnant. The context makes this clear. This conclusion does not require that every individual Israelite living will be saved. It only requires the salvation of the bulk of the nation (cf. Zech. 12—13). Whenever the name "Israel" appears in the New Testament it refers either to the whole nation of Jacob's racial descendants (ethnic Jews) or to the believing remnant within that group. It does not include the church.³⁴¹ "All Israel" does not refer to all Jews who have been believers throughout history either. If that was what Paul meant, this statement would be irrelevant to his argument.³⁴²

"Thus" or "so" means "when that has happened" (NEB) or "then after this" (JB). It may also mean "in this manner," namely the way that Paul described in verses 11-24.³⁴³

The quotation from Jeremiah 59:20-21 not only confirmed Paul's assertion but also hinted at the time this revival will take place. It will happen when Messiah will come out of the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22). This will be at His second coming (Zech. 12:10).

11:27 Isaiah 27:9 also predicted a great removal of Israel's sins and connected it with the bestowal of the New Covenant blessings on Israel (cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

". . . the history of God's dealings with ethnic Israel as set out in Romans 11:1-10, the logic of Israel's reversal of fortune in verses 11-15, supported by the illustration of the olive tree and the regrafting of the natural branches of ethnic Israel into it 'again' in verses 16-24, and the prophecy of the salvation of 'all Israel' in verses 25-27

³⁴⁰Moo, p. 719.

³⁴¹John Calvin believed Israel meant the church (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, p. 255).

³⁴²Murray 2:96-98.

³⁴³Cranfield, 2:576.

combine to establish the future of ethnic Israel as a glorious hope of both Israel and the church."³⁴⁴

- 11:28 Under the present economy God views Israel's physical descendants as a whole as His enemies because of their unbelief. They are "enemies" of His, however, for the sake of the Gentiles to whom He extends grace in this period of Jewish unbelief. However from the standpoint of their national election for a special purpose, they are the objects of His love because of the patriarchs.
- 11:29 The special privileges that God gave Israel are probably what Paul intended by his reference to God's gifts (cf. 9:4-5). They have intimate connection with God's calling of Israel for a special purpose. God will not withdraw these from Israel. He did not choose Israel for her goodness, and He will not abandon her for her badness.
- 11:30-31 These verses are a warning to Gentile believers. We should beware of becoming critical of God for planning to bless Israel in the future. We should also beware of becoming proud because we are presently the special objects of God's favor. We need to remember that God chose Israel so we Gentiles could enjoy salvation (Gen. 12:1-3).
- 11:32 The conclusion of the matter is this. As everyone has been disobedient, Gentiles and Jews alike, so God will show mercy to all as well (cf. 3:9; Gal. 3:22). This is a great ground of assurance.

"A critical frame of reference in Paul's treatment of Israel's salvation is a distinction between corporate and individual election."³⁴⁵

This concludes the argument of chapters 9—11.

"Ethnic Israel has a future, because God will accomplish salvation for Israel according to his new-covenant promise. This awaits the fullness of the Gentiles, when Israel's hardening will be removed and when Gentile provocation will have taken its course. All Israel will be saved in such a way that God's mercy will be evident to all."³⁴⁶

"Perhaps the view most commonly held among evangelical non-dispensationalists is that Israel's future is simply an incorporation of that people into the church. Hoekema speaks for many when he writes, '. . . the future of believing Israelites is not to be separated from the future of

³⁴⁴Johnson, "Evidence from . . .," p. 219.

³⁴⁵Moo, p. 737.

³⁴⁶J. Lanier Burns, "The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 216.

believing Gentiles.' He states that Israel has no particular place in God's future salvation economy: 'Israel's hope for the future is exactly the same as that of believing Gentiles: salvation and ultimate glorification through faith in Christ.'³⁴⁷

Nothing remains but to praise God for His righteousness in dealing with Israel as He has and as He will.

4. Praise for God's wise plan 11:33-36

This doxology corresponds to the one at the end of chapter 8 where Paul concluded his exposition of God's plan for bringing His righteousness to humankind (8:31-39). There the emphasis was on the people of God. Here it is on the plan of God.

- 11:33 God's "wisdom" is His ability to arrange His plan so it results in the good of all concerned and His own glory. His "knowledge" testifies to His ability to construct such a plan. His decisions spring from logic that extends beyond human ability to comprehend. His procedures are so complex that humans cannot discover them without the aid of divine revelation.
- 11:34 Paul agreed with Isaiah again (Isa. 40:13-14). No one can know God's mind fully. God is so wise that He has no need of counselors.
- 11:35 Job's observation that God has never needed to depend on human assistance that puts Him in man's debt (Job 35:7; 41:11) is also true. The fact that God makes people His partners in executing His will in the world does not mean that He cannot get along without us. He can.
- 11:36 God is the source from which all things come, the means by which all things happen, and the goal toward which all things are moving. He is the originator, sustainer, and finisher of everything ultimately (cf. Col. 1:16). In view of all these things (vv. 33-36), He deserves all glory forever.

The primary focus of this doxology, which harmonizes with the subject of chapters 9—11, is God's great plan of salvation through history. However "all things" (v. 36) includes the lives of individuals as well.

Paul had now concluded his theological exposition of how unrighteous human beings can obtain the righteousness of God. Only the explanation of the implications of having this righteousness remained for him to clarify. This practical guidance is especially important since the Christian is no longer under the regulations of the Mosaic Law (7:6; 10:4).

³⁴⁷Saucy, *The Case . . .*, p. 23. The quotation is from Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 201.

VI. THE PRACTICE OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS 12:1—15:13

In contrasting chapters 1—11 with chapters 12—16 of Romans, perhaps the most important distinction is that the first part deals primarily with God's actions for humanity, and the last part deals with people's actions in response to God's. This is an oversimplification of the book, but the distinction is a valid one. God's provision contrasts with man's responsibility to behave in a manner consistent with what God has done, is doing, and will do for him (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). The first part is more information for belief whereas the last part is more exhortation for action. The first part stresses right relations with God and the last part right relations with other people.

"Doctrine must always precede exhortation since in doctrine the saint is shown his exalted position which makes the exhortation to a holy life, a reasonable one, and in doctrine, the saint is informed as to the resources of grace he possesses with which to obey the exhortations."³⁴⁸

Essentially this exhortation, which is both positive and negative, deals with behavior within the spheres of life where the believer lives. These areas are his or her relationship to God, to other members of the body of Christ, and to the civil state. There is a general correspondence here with the instruction that God gave the Israelites through Moses for life in Israel. Paul dealt with the same areas of life: moral, religious and civil life. The differences with the Mosaic Code are as striking as the similarities. Romans does not contain all the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Each of the other New Testament books makes its unique contribution to our understanding of God's will for Christians.

"One of the most striking features of Rom. 12:1—15:13 is the way in which its various themes resemble teaching that Paul gives elsewhere [cf. 12:1-2 and Eph. 4:17-24; 12:3-8 and 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4:11-17; 12:9-21 and 1 Thess. 4:9-12 and 1 Cor. 13; 13:8-10 and Gal. 5:13-15; 13:11-14 and 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 14:1—15:13 and 1 Cor. 8—10]."³⁴⁹

In 14:1—15:13, Paul gave special attention to the problem of knowing how to live in Christian freedom. This section of Romans deals with Christian conduct when God does not specify exactly what we should do in every situation (cf. 1 Cor. 8). In such cases some Christians will do one thing and others another, both within God's will. How to handle these situations is the focus of this section. Chapters 12—13 give directions for Christian conduct generally, and 14:1—15:13 deals with a specific problem that the Roman Christians faced.

A. DEDICATION TO GOD 12:1-2

Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12 deal with the Christian's most important relationship, his or her relationship to God. These verses are both parallel to the sections to follow that deal

³⁴⁸Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, p. 204.

³⁴⁹Moo, p. 745. 13:1-7 has parallels in Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26; and 1 Pet. 2:13-14.

with the Christian's conduct, and they introduce them. Our relationship to God is foundational and governs all our other conduct. Paul had already called for the Christian to present himself or herself to God (6:13-19). Now he repeated that duty as the Christian's most imperative obligation. He had also spoken of false worship and corrupted minds (1:25, 28). This exhortation ties into these two former passages especially.

12:1 "Therefore" draws a conclusion from all that Paul had presented so far, not just chapters 9—11. This is clear from what he proceeded to say. The charge rises out of humankind's universal condemnation by God (3:20), the justification that God has freely provided (5:1), and the assurance of acceptance that the believing sinner can have (8:1). Because of all this, it is only reasonable to present our lives to God as living sacrifices (12:1). In particular the exhortation to present ourselves to God in 6:13-19 is in view.

Exhortation now replaces instruction. Urging (Gr. *parakaleo*) lies between commanding and beseeching. It is "one of the tenderest expressions in all the Bible."³⁵⁰ Probably Paul did not command his readers because the attitude with which one presents himself or herself to God is crucial. The apostle did not want his readers to comply because he had commanded them to do so, but because they wanted to because of what God had done for them. Therefore he made his appeal as strong as possible without commanding. He had previously commanded this conduct (6:13).

". . . I BESEECH YOU — What an astonishing word to come from God! From a God against whom we had sinned, and under whose judgment we were! What a word to us, believers,—a race of sinners so lately at enmity with God,—I beseech you!"³⁵¹

The phrase "the mercies of God," (NASB) refers to all that Paul revealed in this epistle that God has done for the believer. Paul used the singular "mercy" in the Greek text evidently because of his recent exposition of God's mercy in 11:30-32. Mercy denotes the quality in God that led Him to deliver us from our sin and misery. It contrasts with grace. Mercy expresses deliverance from condemnation that we deserve and grace the bestowal of blessings that we do not deserve. Paul called us to sacrifice ourselves to God because He has been merciful to us. In pagan religions of Paul's day the worshippers typically first offered sacrifices to secure the mercy of the gods. That is unnecessary in Christianity because God has taken the initiative.

³⁵⁰J. P. McBeth, *Exegetical and Practical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 229. Paul used *parakaleo* about 50 times in his epistles.

³⁵¹Newell, p. 447. Cf. Phile. 9-10; 2 Cor. 5:20.

Hebrew thought viewed the body as the representation of the whole person. Paul was urging the presentation of the whole person, not just the outer shell (cf. 6:13).³⁵² However, the body does stand in antithesis to the mind in verse 2 so the physical body does seem to be what Paul was stressing particularly.³⁵³ Jewish priests needed to present themselves without blemish as sacrifices to God before they could serve Him (cf. Mal. 1:8-13). The same is true in Christianity. The believer priest's whole life needs giving over to the Lord (cf. Lev. 1). We need to separate our lives from sin to God. This is the essence of holiness (cf. 6:19). This kind of sacrifice is acceptable to God and pleases Him. Some scholars claim that the tense of the verb "present" or "offer" (aorist in Greek) presupposes a decisive offering made once-for-all.³⁵⁴ Others say that the aorist tense does not carry the once-for-all meaning and that Paul simply meant that we should make this offering, without implying how often.³⁵⁵ In view of the nature of the commitment that Paul called for it seems that we should make it decisively as often as we desire. What the Christian needs to present is a life for service to God. In Israel the whole burnt offering, which represented the entire person of the offerer (Lev. 1), burned up completely on the altar. The offerer could not reclaim it because it belonged to God. Paul implied that this should also characterize the Christian's self-sacrifice.

"Spiritual service of worship" (NASB) or "reasonable service" (AV) means that the sacrifice should be thoughtful and deliberate. The animals in Jewish sacrifices could not offer themselves this way because they were animals. There are many ways in which we can worship God, but this is the most fundamental and important way. This service of worship should precede all other service of worship or else worship and service are superficial. Two notable examples of this decisive dedication of self are Isaac (Gen. 22) and our Lord Jesus Christ (John 6:38).

12:2 Verse 1 deals with making the commitment and verse 2 with maintaining it.

"The first verse calls for an explicit act; the second commands a resultant lifelong process. These verses are a call for an act of presentation and the resultant duty of transformation."³⁵⁶

³⁵²Cranfield, 2:598-99.

³⁵³Liddon, p. 228; D. Edmond Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation: An Exposition of Romans 12:1-2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):314.

³⁵⁴E.g., Harrison, p. 127.

³⁵⁵E.g., Moo, p. 750.

³⁵⁶Hiebert, "Presentation and . . .," p. 312.

Both activities are important. The present tense in the Greek text of verse 2 indicates our continuing responsibility in contrast to the aorist tense in verse 1 that stresses a decisive act. The "world" (Gr. *aion*) is the spirit of our age that seeks to exclude God from life (1 John 2:15). The world seeks to "squeeze you into its own mold."³⁵⁷ The Christian should be continually renewing his or her mind by returning mentally to the decision to dedicate self to God and by reaffirming that decision. This continual rededication to God will result in the transformation of the Christian into Christ's image (8:29; cf. Mark 9:2-3). A daily rededication is none too often.

"This re-programming of the mind does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think."³⁵⁸

The Holy Spirit is the unidentified transformer that Paul set in contrast to the world (8:9-11; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 6:17-18; 7:1; Col. 3:9-10; 1 Thess. 5:23; Titus 3:5). "Prove" or "test and approve" involves evaluating and choosing to practice what is the will of God instead of what the world recommends (cf. Eph. 5:8-10). We clarify what God's will for us is by rededicating ourselves to God often. God's will sometimes becomes blurred when our commitment to Him wavers (cf. Eph. 5:8-10). Notice that total commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ is a prerequisite for experiencing God's will.

Dedication results in discernment that leads to delight in God's will. The initial dedication and the subsequent reaffirmation both please God (vv. 1-2, "acceptable" or "pleasing"; cf. Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16). "Good" means essentially good. "Acceptable" means pleasing to God. "Perfect" means it cannot get any better.

Romans 12:1-2 are extremely important verses for Christians. They express our most important responsibility to God, namely submitting completely to His lordship over our lives.³⁵⁹ Christians should make this commitment as close to the moment of their justification as possible. However notice that Paul addressed his appeal to believers, not the unsaved. Dedication to God is a response to the mercy of God that we receive in salvation. It is not a condition for receiving that mercy. It is a voluntary commitment that every Christian *should* make out of love for the Savior, but it is not one that every Christian *will* make. It is possible to be a Christian without ever making this commitment since it is voluntary.

³⁵⁷J. B. Phillips' translation.

³⁵⁸Moo, p. 757.

³⁵⁹The popular saying, "God is my co-pilot," does not give God His rightful place. God wants and deserves to be our pilot, not our co-pilot.

"To require from the unsaved a dedication to His lordship for their salvation is to make imperative what is only voluntary for believers (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 3:15)."³⁶⁰

B. CONDUCT WITHIN THE CHURCH 12:3-21

Every Christian has the same duty toward God, namely dedication (vv. 1-2). Nevertheless the will of God for one Christian will differ from His will for another concerning life and ministry within the body of Christ (vv. 3-21).

1. The diversity of gifts 12:3-8

12:3 Paul began this pericope with a reminder of his apostolic authority. He probably did so because what he was about to say required personal application that would affect the conduct of his readers. The Romans had not met Paul personally so he urged them to receive his teaching humbly. A humble attitude was also important as they evaluated and exercised the individual abilities that God had given each of them (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). Paul had had experiences with Christians, who were proud because of their spiritual gifts, in Corinth where he wrote this epistle (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-31; 13:4; 4:12, 20).

The main point of this entire paragraph (vv. 3-8) is that Christians should not think more highly of ourselves than we should but use sober judgment in evaluating ourselves.

The faith in view in this verse and in verse 6 seems to refer to one's ability to view and use his or her gifts as abilities that God has given. It also involves trusting in God to work through us to bring blessing to others. Such a view of oneself in relation to his or her gifts is sound judgment because it is consistent with reality.³⁶¹ Spiritual gifts do not reflect the worth of the person who has them. For example, a person who has gifts that enable him or her to minister effectively to large crowds of people should not conclude that he or she is a superior Christian.

12:4-5 It is important that we remember that we are part of a larger organism. We are not just a group of individuals each doing our own thing. Paul had previously used the body to illustrate the church in 1 Corinthians 12. What he said here recapped the main idea that he expounded more fully there. The body of Christ is a unified organism, and its members are diverse personally and in their functions.

³⁶⁰Livingston Blauvelt, Jr., "Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:569 (January-March 1986):38.

³⁶¹The "measure of faith" does not refer, then, to how much faith one can muster up but to the faith that God has given every Christian.

"Your right hand has never yet had a fight with the left: on the contrary, each constantly helps the other!"³⁶²

All the members belong to one another; there is mutuality in the church. As members of one another, we cannot work independently effectively. Each member profits from the contribution of every other member too. This realization should help us to avoid becoming proud.

12:6 The gifts that we have are abilities that God gives us by His grace (cf. 1 Cor. 12:6; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). They are capacities for His service.

"Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with."³⁶³

The list that follows is not exhaustive but only illustrative (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27-28). Paul's point here was that it is important that we use our gifts and that we use them in the proper way. All the gifts need using according to the proportion (Gr. *analogia*) of the faith that God has given us. The faith in view, as in verse 3, is probably the amount of faith God has given us, not what we believe, namely Christian teaching.

Probably Paul meant prophecy in the sense of communicating revealed truth (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3, 31) rather than as predicting or proclaiming new revelation. All the other gifts listed here serve the whole church throughout its history so probably Paul viewed prophecy this way too.

12:7-8 All the gifts Paul mentioned in verse 6-8 need exercising within the body of Christ for its members' mutual benefit (cf. v. 5). Obviously other gifts have other purposes. However, Paul was stressing here the need to recognize that the members of the body contribute to the common welfare. In each case he spoke of the way we use these gifts.

"Service" or "serving" (v. 7, Gr. *diakonia*) probably refers to ministering to the material needs of other believers. Teaching involves explaining what God has revealed (cf. 1 Cor. 14:6). It differs from prophesying in that prophesying (from *propheteuo*, lit. to speak forth) evidently included communicating any word from God, inspired or uninspired (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).³⁶⁴

"Exhorts" or "encouraging" translates the Greek word *parakalesis*, sometimes rendered "comfort." All three words are good translations. The context provides the clue to the main idea whenever the word appears.

³⁶²Newell, pp. 460-61.

³⁶³Wiersbe, 1:555.

³⁶⁴See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

Here exhortation is perhaps best. Whereas teaching appeals to the mind, exhortation appeals to the will.³⁶⁵ "Giving" is capable of broad application within the body. We should practice giving with singleness of heart and free of mixed motives (cf. Acts 5). The idea is not so much giving lavishly as giving single-mindedly.

Leaders experience temptation simply to enjoy the benefits of their positions rather than really providing leadership. Showing mercy relates to ministering to the sick and specially needy. A cheerful rather than a grudging attitude is an important part of such ministry.

2. The necessity of love 12:9-21

Verses 9-13 deal with the importance of demonstrating love to fellow believers, and verses 14-21 broaden this responsibility to include wider application to non-believers.

Love for fellow believers 12:9-13

"Nowhere else in Paul's writings do we find a more concise collection of ethical injunctions. In these five verses are thirteen exhortations ranging from love of Christians to hospitality for strangers. There are no finite verbs in the paragraph. There are, however, ten participles that serve as imperatives. In the three other clauses (vv. 9, 10, 11) an imperative must be supplied. Each of the thirteen exhortations could serve as the text for a full-length sermon. What they deal with are basic to effective Christian living."³⁶⁶

12:9 Love is of primary importance (cf. Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; 1 Cor. 13). However it must be sincere (cf. 1 John 4:19-21). This command acts as a heading for this whole list of exhortations.

"Paul is not always talking specifically about love, but he keeps coming back to love as the single most important criterion for approved Christian behavior."³⁶⁷

The totally committed Christian should hate evil and love what is good as his Lord does expressing commitment to His attitudes as well as to His actions.

"What God seeks in the believer is not so much a single worthy act as it is a continuing quality of life."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵Newell, p. 466.

³⁶⁶Mounce, p. 236.

³⁶⁷Moo, p. 774.

³⁶⁸Mounce, p. 237.

- 12:10 We need to express love to individual people as well as to ideals (v. 9). Giving recognition and appreciation to those who deserve it is a concrete way of expressing love.
- 12:11 It is natural for Christians to slack off in our diligence in serving the Lord when we have been Christians for some time. Apollos was a model of someone who maintained fervent diligence in his service (Acts 18:25; cf. Rev. 3:15-16).
- 12:12 We must never lose sight of our hope of things in the future that God has promised us. This will help us persevere in tribulation (cf. 5:3-4). Prayer is our great resource whenever we feel stress and strain (cf. Phil. 4:6-7). Note the same progression from hope to perseverance to prayer in 8:24-27.
- 12:13 We should never be so self-centered that we fail to reach out to others. Again God the Father and God the Son are our great examples here.

Love for all 12:14-21

- 12:14 Paul repeated Jesus' instruction here (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27-28). To persecute means to pursue. Blessing involves both wishing God's best on people and praying for them.
- "The principle of nonretaliation for personal injury permeates the entire New Testament."³⁶⁹
- 12:15 Believers should share the joys and sorrows of their neighbors, especially fellow believers (1 Cor. 12:26; Phil. 4:13).
- 12:16 The first part of this verse means "Have equal regard for one another" (NEB). Feelings of superiority are neither realistic nor appropriate for those who owe all to God's grace.
- 12:17 The second exhortation probably means that we should give thought to how we do what is right so our witness may be most effective to believers and unbelievers alike (cf. Col. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:7).
- 12:18 Paul strongly advocated being a peacemaker (cf. Matt. 5:9), but he did not promote peace at any price. In some situations, peace might give way to conflict if, for example, the truth is at stake. Notwithstanding the believer should not be the instigator of trouble under normal circumstances. Note Paul's two qualifiers regarding living at peace in this verse.

³⁶⁹Ibid., p. 239.

- 12:19 If hostility does erupt, the Christian should not retaliate. Rather he or she should trust God to right the wrong (cf. 1 Sam. 24—26). Long ago God promised to take care of His people when others wronged them (Deut. 32:35).
- 12:20 Instead of doing one's enemy an unkindness the believer should do him or her positive good (cf. Matt. 5:44). This may result in the antagonist acknowledging his error and even turning to God in repentance. Heaping burning coals on his head figuratively describes doing good that results in the conviction and shame of the enemy. The expression alludes to the old custom of carrying burning coals in a pan. When one's fire went out at home, a person would have to go to a neighbor and request hot coals that he or she would then carry home on the head. Carrying the coals involved some danger, discomfort, and uneasiness for the person carrying them. Nevertheless they were the evidence of the neighbor's love. Likewise the person who receives good for evil feels uncomfortable because of his neighbor's love. This guilt may convict the wrongdoer of his or her ways in a gentle manner.
- 12:21 Paul again concluded with a summary. Being overcome by evil means giving in to the temptation to pay back evil for evil. When people do wrong, they expect to receive evil from those they have wronged. When they receive kindness instead, their hard hearts often become softer.

There is a progression in 12:9-21. Paul progressed from the Christian's duty to his fellow believers to action that would affect non-Christians as well. However all that Paul wrote in 12:3-21 is directly applicable to life within the body of Christ. The believer may encounter enemies there as well as in the world.

The general nature of the commands in this pericope illustrates the essentially gracious character of the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) under which Christians now live. Compare this with the legal nature of the commands in the Mosaic Law (cf. 10:4). God gave the Israelites many explicit commands about how they were to behave in a multitude of specific situations. The commands in verses 9-21, as well as in all the New Testament, are much more general and are similar to principles. This is one reason we say the Israelites lived under "law" and we live under "grace."

C. CONDUCT WITHIN THE STATE CH. 13

This chapter broadens the Christian's sphere of responsibility by extending it to include the civil government under which he or she lives. Romans 13 is the premier New Testament passage that explains the believer's civil responsibilities. Paul expounded what it means to render unto Caesar what belongs to him (Matt. 22:21). This subject has bearing on the spread of the gospel so it is especially appropriate in this epistle. The connection with 12:17-21 should be obvious. This passage also ties in with 12:1-2 as one sphere of application. The church is not a nation among nations as Israel was.

Consequently it was important that Paul clarify Christians' duties to our earthly rulers as well as our duty to our heavenly Ruler.³⁷⁰

1. Conduct towards the government 13:1-7

Paul passed from a loosely connected series of exhortations in 12:9-21 to a well-organized argument about a single subject in 13:1-7.

"Forbidding the Christian from taking vengeance and allowing God to exercise this right in the last judgment [cf. 12:19-21] might lead one to think that God was letting evildoers have their way in this world. Not so, says Paul in 13:1-7: for God, through governing authorities, is even now inflicting wrath on evildoers (vv. 3-4)."³⁷¹

13:1 When Paul said "every person" (Gr. *psyche*) he probably had every Christian person in mind since he was writing to Christians. Nevertheless what he said about his readers' conduct toward their civil government also applies to the unsaved.

Subjection or submission involves placing oneself under the authority of another so that he or she does what the authority requires. Paul did not say "obey." Submission includes obedience, but it also includes an attitude from which the obedience springs. Submission involves an attitude of compliance that is not necessarily present in obedience. Submission is essentially support. The Christian may have to disobey his government (Acts 5:29). Still in those cases he or she must still be submissive and bear the consequences of his or her disobedience (cf. Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). "Governing authorities" is a term that embraces all the rulers who govern the citizen.

Every ruler exercises his or her authority because God has allowed him or her to occupy his or her position, even Satan (Luke 4:6). The Christian should acknowledge that the government under which he or she lives has received authority from God to govern regardless of whether it governs well or poorly.

God has established three institutions to control life in our dispensation: the family (Gen. 2:18-25), the civil government (Gen. 9:1-7), and the church (Acts 2). In each institution there are authorities to whom we need to submit for God's will to go forward. Women are not the only people

³⁷⁰See John A. Witmer, "The Man with Two Countries," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133:532 (October-December 1976):338-49; W. Robert Cook, "Biblical Light on the Christian's Civil Responsibility," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:505 (January-March 1970):44-47); and Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know about Social Responsibility*, pp. 77-84; idem, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That . . .*, pp. 11-22.

³⁷¹Moo, p. 792.

God commands to be submissive or supportive. Male and female children, citizens, and church members also need to demonstrate a submissive spirit.

- 13:2 Refusal to submit to one's government is tantamount to refusing to submit to God. Those who resist God's ordained authority can expect to suffer condemnation by the government. This is really the indirect judgment of God (cf. Matt. 26:52).

"Capital punishment was ordained in Genesis 9:5-6, and it has not been abolished [by God]."³⁷²

- 13:3 There are two possible ways to explain this verse that on the surface seems very naive. Each of these interpretations will have very different results for those who hold them. The problem, of course, is that rulers are sometimes, perhaps often, a cause of fear for those who do right. Government authorities sometimes abuse their powers for selfish ends. If they do not but serve the welfare of the people as they should, we have no fear of them and can submit to them fairly easily. What if they are evil?

The first way some people have interpreted this verse is to assume that Paul was speaking only of the norm. The normal situation would be a good government that punishes evil and rewards good. Obviously rebellion and revolution would be wrong in such a situation. However those actions might not be wrong if the state ceased to serve its God-given function and began denying the rights and removing the liberties of its citizens. Moderate advocates of this interpretation usually do not suggest that the church as an institution should lead a revolution. Most of them would say, however, that Christians as individuals could justifiably participate in a revolution against such a government. Christians should speak out against such abuses at least. We must be careful not to confuse submission with silence. Silence can express approval.

The second way of interpreting this verse is to take Paul's words at face value and trust in the fact expressed in 8:28. The Christian who takes this view would not participate in a revolution though he might speak out against a government's evils. He should prepare himself to accept the consequences of his actions. Such was the position of some pastors in Nazi Germany during World War II, for example, who went to prison not for revolting against the government but for speaking out against it. Another alternative might be to flee from the persecution of a hostile government (cf. Matt. 10:23). This is what the Huguenots, who fled from France to England, and the Puritans, who fled from England to America, did.

³⁷²Wiersbe, 1:557.

I tend to prefer the second option mainly because I am uncomfortable if I assume that Paul meant something that he did not state. I prefer to accept what he said at face value. In this case the rulers would be a cause of fear for the Christian neither if the rulers were just nor unjust. The Christian would be obedient to God by submitting in either case. The problem with this view is that evil governments do not praise those who oppose them. But in a sense they do. For example, a German pastor whom the Nazis jailed for disobeying the law received the commendation of the rest of the world. The martyrdom of Christians by Nero shortly after Paul wrote Romans was an indirect praise of them for their fidelity to Christ. The evil government may not issue a certificate of commendation to the faithful Christian, but his or her submissive conduct can be the cause of his praise. Even if no other human being ever learned of the martyr's conduct, God would know about it and would praise him or her.

13:4 God will use government, good and bad, to bring the submissive Christian what is good from His perspective (cf. 8:28). Christians who are not submissive should fear because government has received its power to punish evil-doers from God.³⁷³

13:5 There are two reasons a Christian needs to be submissive to his government. One is that the government may punish him if he is not submissive. The other is that God may punish him. God's punishment may be during the Christian's lifetime or after that at the judgment seat of Christ. In this case the punishment might involve the loss of some reward that the believer would have received had he or she been submissive. "Conscience" refers to the believer's knowledge of God's will and purposes.³⁷⁴

"The United States Government maintains a 'Conscience Fund' for people who want to pay their debts to the Government and yet remain anonymous. Some city governments have a similar fund. I read about a city that had investigated some tax frauds and announced that several citizens were going to be indicted. They did not release the names of the culprits. That week, a number of people visited the City Hall to 'straighten out their taxes'—and many of them were not on the indictment list. When conscience begins to work, we cannot live with ourselves until we have made things right."³⁷⁵

³⁷³See Newell, pp. 497-98, for a brief excursus on capital punishment.

³⁷⁴Moo, p. 803.

³⁷⁵Wiersbe, 1:557.

- 13:6 This double duty to government and God should also make the Christian submissive when the bill for his taxes falls due. Government workers are indirectly God's servants, and we should support God's servants (Luke 10:7). Individual rulers may be unworthy, but the institution is not. Governments cannot function without incomes. This is the third time Paul referred to government (twice in v. 4).
- 13:7 Paul as Jesus commanded believers to give back (Gr. *apodote*) to the government what we owe for services it renders (cf. Mark 12:14, 17). Paying taxes has always been repugnant to people including Christians. Some Christians argue this way. Since the government uses my tax money for purposes that are contrary to God's will, I do not want to support evil by paying taxes. Jesus came out flatly in favor of paying taxes and led his disciples in doing so even though the Roman government to which He paid them crucified Him. Likewise Paul here urged Christians to pay tribute ("taxes") to a foreign ruler, revenue tax ("custom," as in the "Internal Revenue Service"). He commanded his readers to respect ("fear") those in positions of high authority because of their office if not for personal reasons. He called us to "honor" all who serve the public in civil service positions.

Peter practiced and taught submission to governmental rulers as Paul did (Acts 4:1-3; 12:3-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Peter did disobey his rulers but willingly suffered the consequences for his disobedience. He only disobeyed the law under which he lived as a citizen of Israel when it conflicted with the law under which he lived as a citizen of heaven (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).³⁷⁶ I believe Paul's emphasis on submission rather than obedience allows room for civil disobedience when the civil government requires, but not permits, the Christian to disobey God (cf. Exod. 1:17-21). When the will of man conflicts with the will of God, the Christian must choose to do the will of God (Acts 5:29).³⁷⁷

For example, the Christian's obligation to submit to a government that *requires* abortions would be different from his or her duty to one that only *permits* them. I believe a Christian should disobey a government when it requires him or her to practice abortion but not if it only permits abortions (cf. Exod. 1:15-22). I do not believe a Christian should break the law to protest an ungodly practice that his or her government only permits. If he or she disagrees with a law, that Christian should pursue whatever legal options exist to change the law. I believe that those who choose to break the law to make a statement, even though they are willing to suffer the

³⁷⁶Compare also the fact that in the Great Tribulation believers must not give allegiance to the Beast who will rule over the whole earth but remain loyal to Christ.

³⁷⁷See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Christian and Civil Disobedience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:506 (April-June 1970):153-62.

consequences (e.g., go to jail), violate New Testament teaching on this subject.

2. Conduct toward unbelievers 13:8-10

Paul had previously glorified the importance of love among believers (12:9-10). Now he urged this attitude toward all people though unbelievers are primarily in view in this chapter. The connecting link in the argument is our obligations to government (v. 7) and to our fellow citizens (v. 8; cf. Gal. 5:13-15).

13:8 The NASB translation "Owe nothing to anyone" is misleading because it contradicts Jesus' teaching to loan to those who want to borrow from you (Matt. 5:42). He implied that borrowing is not always wrong. The New Testament does not forbid borrowing, only the practice of charging exorbitant interest on loans and failing to pay debts (Matt. 25:27; Luke 19:23). There are two kinds of debts: those with the lender's consent and those without his consent. It is the second type to which Paul apparently referred here. The NIV's "Let no debt remain outstanding" avoids the problem and gives the correct interpretation. Some Christians who have trouble controlling their indebtedness have found motivation for cutting up their credit cards in this verse, but Paul did not say that all borrowing is wrong.

We do have a debt that continues forever. It is our obligation to seek the welfare of our fellow human beings (cf. 8:4). The Mosaic Law required the same thing (Lev. 19:18, cf. Matt. 22:39), but it provided no internal power to love. In Christ we have the indwelling Holy Spirit who produces love within us as a fruit of His life (Gal. 5:22-23).

13:9-10 Paul again appealed to the Law to show that what he had written in verse 8 was in harmony with what God had commanded earlier. Whereas the Mosaic Law specified numerous situations in which the Israelites were to practice love, the Law of Christ contains very few. The simple principle is enough. This is an excellent example of the essentially legal character of the Mosaic Law and the gracious character of Christ's teachings. Jesus Christ gave us a model to follow in loving (John 13:34). Love promotes obedience.

"The Christian, who belongs to the New Covenant people of God, is no longer 'under the [Mosaic] law,' the law for the Old Covenant people of God; he is under a 'new law,' 'the law of Christ' (see Gal. 6:2 and 1 Cor. 9:19-21). And central to this new law is a command that Christ himself took from the Mosaic law and made central to his new

demand: the command to love our neighbors as ourselves (cf. Gal. 6:2 with 5:13-14)."³⁷⁸

"What is commanded is that we are to have the same loving regard for others that we have instinctively for ourselves."³⁷⁹

3. Conduct in view of our hope 13:11-14

Paul's thought moved from identifying responsibilities to urging their practice. What lies before us as Christians provides essential motivation for doing so.

13:11 "This" refers to the duties urged earlier, not only in this chapter but in chapter 12 also. It is important that we follow God's will carefully because the final phase of our salvation will take place very soon (i.e., glorification, cf. 1 Pet. 1:9). We must be ready to meet the Lord and to give an account of our stewardship to Him (cf. Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Cor. 15:34). It is possible for us to go through our lives as believers lethargic and insensible, but such a condition is not wise in view of what lies ahead of us.

13:12 Here Paul was thinking similarly to the way he thought when he wrote 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. The night represents our earthly life plagued as it is with spiritual darkness and danger. When the Lord Jesus calls us to Himself at the Rapture, a new day will begin for us in which we will walk and live in sinless light. In view of this prospect we need to prepare for it by laying aside evil deeds as a garment and putting on deeds of holiness. Paul called these new clothes armor because we are still at war with sin and the forces of evil (cf. Eph. 6:11).

"Christ's return is the next event in God's plan; Paul knew it could take place at any time and sought to prepare Christians—both in his generation and in ours—for that "blessed hope."³⁸⁰

13:13 Our behavior, and specially those things Paul called on his readers to do in 13:1-10, should be distinctively Christian since we live among unbelievers. The practices he urged us to avoid here were common in Corinth where Paul wrote this epistle. He observed them constantly. Intemperance often leads to sexual sin that frequently results in contention and quarreling.

³⁷⁸Moo, pp. 816-17.

³⁷⁹Mounce, p. 246.

³⁸⁰Moo, p. 822.

13:14 In one sense every believer puts on Jesus Christ when he or she trusts Him as Savior (Gal. 3:27). However in another sense we put Him on when we dedicate ourselves to Him as our lord (12:1). The first step in putting on the armor of light (v. 12) is committing ourselves to follow Jesus Christ wholeheartedly.

Still dedicating is not all that is necessary. There must also be a deliberate turning away from desires to indulge the flesh (cf. ch. 6; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Chapter 13 deals with living in the world as a Christian. Paul counselled submission to human government and love for all people while we actively wait for our Lord to appear.

D. CONDUCT WITHIN CHRISTIAN LIBERTY 14:1—15:13

Paul moved on to discuss a problem that arises as the dedicated Christian seeks to live within God's will in the body of Christ (12:3-21) and in the body politic (ch. 13). As Christians the 613 specific commands of the Mosaic Law no longer govern our conduct (7:6; 10:4), but the principles that Jesus Christ and His apostles revealed do (cf. chs. 12—13). How then should we deal with conflicting applications of these principles? How should we conduct ourselves when our interpretation of God's will conflicts with that of another believer? Paul explained how believers can disagree on nonessentials and still maintain unity in the church.

"From speaking of those who were too lax in the indulgence of natural appetites [13:11-14], the subject passes mainly to those who are too scrupulous. The object is not to remove these scruples, but to show those who have them and those who have them not how to live in Christian peace."³⁸¹

The command to accept one another begins (14:1) and climaxes this section (15:7). Within it Paul also gave three other "one another" references (14:13, 19; 15:5).

1. The folly of judging one another 14:1-12

The apostle dealt first with the importance of not judging one another. This was a particular temptation to those Christians who believed that they should refrain from some practices that they believed were displeasing to God but which other Christians felt were legitimate. When Paul wrote, this group included Jewish Christians who because of their background in Judaism tended to perpetuate the practices commanded in the Mosaic Code. In our day this group includes Christians who for one reason or another do not

³⁸¹Stifler, p. 222.

believe certain amoral practices are proper for a believer even though other Christians judge them permissible.³⁸²

"This paragraph divides into three sections: vv. 1-3, 4-9, and 10-12. The divisions between the sections are marked with similar rhetorical questions, each using the second person singular: 'Who are you who is judging the servant of another?' (v. 4a); 'Why are you judging your brother?' (v. 10a). . . . The first (vv. 1-3) and the third (vv. 10-12) state in almost identical language the main point of the paragraph: the 'strong' are not to 'despise' the 'weak'; the 'weak' are not to 'judge' the 'strong' (cf. vv. 3a and 10a). In the central section, vv. 4-9, Paul provides the theological foundation for these commands: every Christian is a servant of the Lord; and it is to that 'master,' and not to any other fellow servant, that the believer must answer."³⁸³

- 14:1 Paul spoke here to those who, as himself, understood the implications of Christian liberty. The other group, the weak in faith, consisted of those whose faith was not strong enough to enable them to exercise the full liberty they had in Christ.³⁸⁴ In view of what Paul wrote about the weak they appear to have been Jewish Christians who refrained from certain foods and observed certain days because they remained loyal to the Mosaic Law. Peter at one time struggled with the extent of his liberty and moved from being weak to being strong in faith (Acts 10). However in the process of his growth he had a relapse (Gal. 2:11-12). The weak in faith have a sensitive conscience about doing things that might be unwise. A sensitive conscience is a good thing, but it can sometimes lead a person to restrict his or her freedom unnecessarily. Paul urged the Christian who appreciated the extent of his freedom to accept his weaker brother as an equal. Nevertheless he was not to accept him and then condemn him mentally, much less publicly, for his scruples.
- 14:2 Here is a specific case of disagreement. Paul did not say why the weaker brother chose not to eat meat. This brother's reasons were immaterial to Paul. The point is that for some reason this Christian believed that he would please God more by not eating meat than by eating it. He was wrong. God has not forbidden Christians to eat any food (1 Tim. 4:3-4). Eating food is an amoral matter. It is neither morally good nor morally bad. The contrast with life in Israel is again striking.

³⁸²An amoral practice is neither right nor wrong in itself. It does not involve morality. Examples include practices like participating in or watching sporting events, reading, maintaining one's property, eating, men wearing earrings or pony tails, women wearing cosmetics, practicing birth control, et al.

³⁸³Moo, pp. 834-35.

³⁸⁴Paul may have coined the designations "weak" and "strong," or these may have been terms that the Romans themselves used.

- 14:3 The person who eats should not view himself as superior even though he is right or look down on his extremely sensitive brother with a condescending attitude. The weaker brother should not judge the more liberal Christian as unacceptable to God either because God has accepted him.
- 14:4 The weaker brother needs to remember to whom the stronger brother is responsible and leave his judgment to God. Paul assured the weaker brother that the stronger brother would stand approved by God because God approves his liberty. God's grace provides both the possibility and the power for standing. The first part of this verse sounds very much like 2:1 and 3, where Paul rebuked the self-satisfied Jew.
- 14:5 Here is a second illustration. In this case the weaker brother does something and the stronger does not (v. 6). This is the opposite of the situation that Paul pictured in the previous illustration. Again the reason the weaker brother observes the day is immaterial. The point is that he observes the day. When Paul wrote, Sabbath and Jewish feast day observances were matters of disagreement among Christians. The Jewish believers tended to observe these and the Gentile believers did not. Today the idea that by observing a certain day we please God more than we would if we did not is quite common. Some Christians believe that we should behave differently on Sunday, during Lent, or on some other "religious" day.
- 14:6 The most important thing is to seek to please the Lord in all that we do. Christians will come to differing conclusions about what this means in practice, but their submission to Jesus Christ's lordship is primary. Paul meant that one person does not eat meat and another does eat meat, but both give God thanks for what they do eat (v. 2; cf. 1 Tim. 4:5).
- 14:7-8 In verse 7 Paul did not mean that our behavior influences other people. Obviously it does. He meant that no Christian should live to please himself alone but should live to please the Lord. The context makes this clear (vv. 6, 8). Really the dedicated Christian's desire to please the Lord will continue beyond the grave so Paul could also say that we do not die for ourselves. Our whole existence this side of the grave and the other, in life and in death, should express our commitment to please the Lord (8:38-39; cf. Phil. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:9). Death does not just mark a transition for the Christian from struggle to rest. Death is also a doorway that leads to new enlarged opportunities for service and worship (cf. Luke 19:11-27). Intimate relationship to the Lord is and remains of primary importance. God controls the events leading to our deaths as He does those governing our lives.

- 14:9 Jesus Christ also lived, died, and lives again. Consequently He is Lord of both those who have died and those who are still alive. Paul's point was that He is the Judge, and we are not.
- 14:10 Both the critical weaker brother and the scorning stronger brother are guilty of the same offense, namely judging prematurely and unwarrantedly. Note that Jesus Christ (v. 9) is the God (v. 10) who will judge. This then is another reference to the judgment seat (Gr. *bema*) of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15).³⁸⁵
- 14:11 Everyone will bow in judgment before the Son of God (Isa. 49:13; 45:23; cf. Phil. 2:10-11). Christians will do so at the judgment seat of Christ following the Rapture (Luke 14:14; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12). Old Testament saints will do so at the Second Coming (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). Unbelievers will do so at the great white throne judgment at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). Of course, no one judged at the judgment seat of Christ will be an unbeliever. The Lord will judge us to determine our faithfulness to our stewardship during our earthly lives. The judgment we receive will apparently determine our opportunity to serve Him in the future (Luke 19:11-27).
- 14:12 In this summary statement Paul identified the personal responsibility of every Christian to give account of himself or herself to God. We will not have to answer for our fellow Christians or anyone else, but we will have to account for our own deeds.

"We stand before God in the awful loneliness of our own souls; to God we can take nothing but the self and the character which in life we have been building up."³⁸⁶

In this pericope (vv. 1-12) the apostle stressed the folly of judging our fellow Christians who relate to amoral practices differently from the way we do. There is a strong emphasis on recognizing Jesus' lordship in our lives in these verses. The word "Lord" occurs seven times in verses 5-9.

2. The evil of offending another 14:13-23

In the previous section Paul addressed both the "weak" and the "strong" Christians, but he spoke mainly about the weaker brother's temptation to condemn the stronger believer. In this section he dealt more with the temptation that the stronger brother faces. Paul structured his argument in a chiasm.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*.

³⁸⁶Barclay, p. 205.

³⁸⁷Moo, p. 850.

- A Warning about stumbling blocks (13b)
 - B Nothing is "unclean" in itself (14a)
 - C Warning about destroying one for whom Christ died (15b)
 - C' Warning about tearing down the work of God (20a)
 - B All things are "clean" in themselves (20b)
- A Warning about causing another believer to stumble (21)

14:13 The Greek word translated "obstacle" (NASB) or "stumbling block" (NIV; *proskomma*) refers to an object on a path against which someone strikes his foot and consequently stumbles or falls (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9). The stronger brother's liberty might retard the weaker brother's progress as he walks the Christian path. It might set him back temporarily or even do permanent damage to his sensitive conscience.

Another Greek word translated "stumbling block" (NASB) or "obstacle" (NIV; *skandalon*) describes a snare used to catch an animal or victim as it walks by (cf. Matt 16:23; 1 Cor. 8:13). The stronger brother's liberty might even constitute a temptation for the weaker brother to sin. It might tempt him to go beyond his stronger brother's behavior and cast off restraint in moral as well as amoral matters.

"Here now is indeed a field for *judging!* and it is ourselves,
not our brother, which we are to judge!"³⁸⁸

14:14 The Lord Jesus taught that the distinction between ceremonially clean and unclean food had ended (Mark 7:15-23). Nevertheless not all Christians had grasped this teaching (e.g., Acts 10:9-15). Many still regarded the Jewish dietary laws as God's will for them. Is it any wonder that many Christians even today mistakenly think that the Mosaic Code constitutes their rule of life?

14:15 The words "grieved" and "destroy" describe two different stages. When one person sees another doing what his own conscience condemns, it grieves him or causes him pain. When he then proceeds to do himself what his conscience condemns, he commits sin and experiences moral destruction.

The apostle's point was this. If your behavior regarding amoral things is creating spiritual problems for another Christian, your conduct is not loving (cf. 12:10). The welfare of a brother should obviously take precedence over our liberty to do something amoral (cf. 1 Cor. 8:13). The stronger brother's conduct could destroy the weaker brother's walk with God permanently or just temporarily. It would be terrible for a Christian to destroy someone whom our Lord has saved.

³⁸⁸Newell, p. 510.

14:16 The good thing refers to the liberty to eat meat or to do anything amoral. People could legitimately speak of it as evil if it resulted in the fall of a brother.

14:17 The kingdom of God here refers to the sphere over which God rules and in which all believers live and operate.

"[The 'kingdom of God' is] an echo of our Lord's teaching. The phrase is used normally in St. Paul of that Messianic kingdom which is to be the reward and goal of the Christian life . . . Hence it comes to mean the principles or ideas on which that kingdom is founded, and which are already exhibited in this world (cf. I Cor. iv. 20)."³⁸⁹

The emphasis in this reference is on the authority of God over His own. The primary issues in the lives of dedicated Christians should not be external amoral practices but the great spiritual qualities that the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in them. These qualities include right conduct (cf. 6:13, 16, 18), peace with God (cf. Phil. 4:7), and joy (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). Paul wanted his readers to keep their priorities in perspective.

14:18 Acceptance with God for Christians involves the stressing of these great kingdom graces rather than whether or not we engage in some amoral practice. This emphasis also wins the approval of other people since they realize what is more and less important.

"Let us ask ourselves, Does *my* walk please God? Is it approved in the hearts of men?"³⁹⁰

14:19 The things that make for peace in the context refer to practices that do not cause others to stumble and attitudes that are non-judgmental. Peace between the strong and the weak is in view primarily. Rather than tearing down we should do things that build one another up. For the strong this might be foregoing some legitimate amoral practice. For the weak it could be refraining from verbal criticism and judgmental thinking.

14:20 "Christian history, alas, shows numerous examples of people utterly earnest about nonessentials, who have felt at liberty to break the unity of the Church for the sake of their particular fetish."³⁹¹

³⁸⁹Sanday and Headlam, p. 391. See also Robert L. Saucy, "The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):42.

³⁹⁰Newell, pp. 513-14.

³⁹¹Hunter, p. 121.

Even though God permits the eating of all foods, for example, He does not sanction eating a food if a Christian causes spiritual problems for someone else by eating it. This destroys the work that God is doing in building His church.

"While freedom is a right, it is not a guide for conduct. Love serves that purpose. Rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love."³⁹²

14:21 It is interesting that the apostle mentioned drinking wine since that is one of the most problematic amoral practices in American evangelicalism. Paul himself was willing to forego any particular food or drink to avoid causing spiritual growth problems for a brother (1 Cor. 8:13; cf. Mark 9:42). Certainly we should be willing to do the same. We willingly alter our pace of walking while leading a small child by the hand so he or she will not stumble. How much more should we be willing to alter our Christian walk for the benefit of a weaker brother or sister in Christ whom we are leading.

". . . modern Christians who . . . abstain from all alcoholic beverages do so not because they fear ritual contamination. Some abstain because they are leery of a product that has had such a sad history of 'enslaving' those who partake (see the principle of 1 Cor. 6:12b). Many others do not drink because they do not want to set a bad example for others who might not be able to handle alcohol. Abstinence on these grounds may be a laudable course of action; but it has little basis in Paul's argument in these chapters. For the 'weak' here are not those who cannot control their drinking. They are people who are not convinced that their faith in Christ allows them to do a particular thing. They are not 'weak' in respect to handling alcohol; they are 'weak' in respect to their faith (14:1). And Paul urges the 'strong' to abstain, not because their example might lead the 'weak' to drink to excess but because their example might lead the 'weak' to drink and so to violate their conscience (14:22-23)."³⁹³

14:22 Paul evidently wrote this verse with the strong in view primarily (cf. v. 23). He did not want his readers to force their convictions ("faith") about amoral practices on others. The strong believer can be happy in his private enjoyment of amoral practices because he knows that he is neither violating the will of God nor the conscience of a weak brother.

³⁹²Mounce, pp. 257-58.

³⁹³Moo, p. 881.

14:23 This verse, in contrast to verse 22, seems addressed particularly to the weak. The weak brother who eats something that he believes he should not eat stands condemned by his own conscience and by God (cf. Gal. 2:11). His action is contrary to what he believes is right. "Faith" here as in verses 1 and 22 does not refer to the teachings of Christianity but to what a person believes to be the will of God for him. If a person does what he believes to be wrong, even though it is not wrong in itself, it becomes sin for him. He has violated what he believes to be God's will. His action has become an act of rebellion against God for him.

"Whatever is done without the conviction that God has approved it is by definition sin. God has called us to a life of faith. Trust is the willingness to put all of life before God for his approval. Any doubt concerning an action automatically removes that action from the category of that which is acceptable."³⁹⁴

"For a Christian not a single decision and action can be good which he does not think he can justify on the ground of his Christian conviction and his liberty before God in Christ."³⁹⁵

3. The importance of pleasing one another 15:1-6

Paul now developed the key concept to which he referred in chapter 14, namely putting the welfare of others before that of self (cf. Gal. 6:2). This is love.

15:1 The strong ought to take the initiative in resolving the tension between the strong and the weak. They need to be willing to limit their Christian liberty if by doing so they can reduce the problems of their brethren. The weak need knowledge, and the strong need love. Paul was not saying that the strong must determine to put up with the weak. He meant, "Those of us who are strong must accept as our own burden the tender scruples of the weak."³⁹⁶

15:2 All Christians, not just the strong, need to apply this principle of love. Paul was not saying that we should be "people pleasers" and do whatever anyone wants us to do simply because it will please them (cf. Gal. 1:10, 19; Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22; 1 Thess. 2:4). The goal of our behavior should be the other person's welfare and spiritual edification (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). We

³⁹⁴Mounce, pp. 258-59.

³⁹⁵H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 291.

³⁹⁶Revised English Bible.

should not please others rather than God, but we should please others rather than ourselves.

- 15:3 The apostle illustrated the commitment to doing the will of God that he advocated with the example of Jesus Christ. In Him we can see the difference between a people pleaser and a people lover. Sacrificing His own preferences for the welfare of others did not make Him acceptable to everyone, but it did make Him acceptable to His Father. David voiced the testimony that Paul quoted here regarding his zeal for God's house (Ps. 69:9). Christians need to show as strong commitment to building up God's spiritual house as David displayed in promoting His physical house.
- 15:4 Paul used his reference to David's experience as an occasion to comment on the usefulness of all Old Testament Scripture.³⁹⁷ It provides motivation for enduring and gives encouragement as we seek to remain faithful in our commitment to do God's will. These Scriptures give us hope because in them we see God's approval of those who persevered faithfully in spite of opposition and frustration.
- 15:5 Endurance and encouragement come to us through the Scriptures, but they are gifts from God. Paul wished that all his readers, the strong and the weak, would appropriate these gifts and apply them in their interpersonal relationships. The result would be unity in the church.

"The centripetal magnetism of the Lord can effectively counter the centrifugal force of individual judgment and opinion."³⁹⁸

- 15:6 United vocal praise of God in the assembly would be an evidence of unity among the strong and the weak. Christians who do not love God and one another have trouble praising God together in church meetings.

"This suggests to us that the local church must major in the Word of God and prayer. The first real danger to the unity of the church came because the Apostles were too busy to minister God's Word and pray (Acts 6:1-7)."³⁹⁹

4. The importance of accepting one another 15:7-13

This section concludes Paul's instructions concerning the importance of accepting one another as Christians that he began in 14:1. In this section the apostle charged both the strong and the weak.

³⁹⁷See George W. Knight, III, "The Scriptures Were Written for Our Instruction," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (March 1996):3-13.

³⁹⁸Harrison, p. 153.

³⁹⁹Wiersbe, 1:562.

- 15:7 "Accept" repeats Paul's opening exhortation (14:1). "One another" encompasses both groups, the strong and the weak. It is inconsistent for a Christian to reject someone whom God has accepted. We are to receive one another as Jesus Christ has received us. We are fellow members of the family of God. This results in glory for God.
- 15:8 Verses 8-10 expand the idea of Jesus Christ accepting us. Verse 8 deals with His acceptance of Jews. He not only accepted Jewish believers but came to serve the Jewish people, as the Old Testament predicted, fulfilling God's promise to the patriarchs (Mark 10:45; Matt. 15:24; cf. Gal. 3:16). Consequently the typically stronger Gentile believers should not despise their sometimes weaker Jewish brethren.
- 15:9-10 These verses deal with Jesus Christ's acceptance of Gentiles. The citations show that God always purposed to bless the Gentiles. Therefore conservative Jewish believers should not despise their more liberal Gentile brethren. I use these adjectives describing their relationship to amoral matters. Four quotations from the Old Testament ("writings," "law," and "prophets") follow that support Paul's assertions in verses 8 and 9a as a whole.
- Psalm 18:49 pictures David rejoicing in God for his victories among the nations that had become subject to him. In Deuteronomy 32:43 Moses saw the Gentiles praising God with the Israelites. These passages would have encouraged Paul's Jewish readers to accept their Gentile brethren.
- 15:11-12 Two more quotations picture the Gentiles praising God alone apart from participation in Israel (Ps. 117:1; Isa. 11:10). Perhaps Paul cited them to help his Jewish readers remember that their Gentile brethren did not need to come to God through the Jews or Judaism.
- 15:13 This verse concludes the section dealing with the practice of God's righteousness (12:1—15:13). It is another pious wish (cf. v. 5).
- The mention of hope points forward to the future. Throughout this epistle Paul kept referring to the fact that God had not finished His saving work in his readers' lives. They were still under construction as Christians. There was more to God's salvation than they had experienced yet. In closing his treatise on God's righteousness the apostle focused his readers' attention on the rest of their sanctification and final glorification.
- The God of hope is the God who inspires hope in and provides hope for His redeemed ones. Christians can be joyful because of what God has already done for us and is doing for us. We can also be peaceful as we realize what He is doing for us now and what He will do for us in the

future. It is possible for us to abound in hope because the omnipotent Holy Spirit is at work in us.

This concludes Paul's exposition of the theme of the righteousness of God that constitutes the heart of this epistle (1:18—15:13). Paul showed man's need of God's righteousness (1:18—3:20), how God imputes it to people who trust in His Son (3:21—5:21), and how He imparts it to those to whom He has imputed it (chs. 6—8). Moreover he demonstrated that God is righteous in doing all this (chs. 9—11). He ended by urging his readers to practice their righteousness in their most important relationships (12:1—15:13).

VII. CONCLUSION 15:14—16:27

The conclusion of the epistle corresponds to its introduction (1:1-17; cf. 15:14 and 1:8; 15:15b-21 and 1:3, 13; 15:22 and 1:13a; 15:27 and 1:14; 15:29 and 1:11-12; and 15:30-32 and 1:9-10). Both sections deal with matters of personal interest to Paul and frame his exposition of the righteousness of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1-9; 16:5-24). However in both sections what Paul wrote about himself related to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A. PAUL'S MINISTRY 15:14-33

The apostle first gave information concerning his past labors (15:14-21). Then he explained his present program (15:22-29). Finally he shared his future plans (15:30-33).

1. Past labors 15:14-21

Paul had been somewhat critical of the strong and the weak in the Roman church (14:1—15:13). He now balanced those comments by pointing out other strengths in the church beside the faith of his Roman brethren (1:8).

15:14 Paul's knowledge of the church in Rome had come to him through sources other than personal observation (vv. 22-24).

"Goodness" is moral excellence that comes through the working of God's Spirit (Gal. 5:22; cf. Rom. 5:13). Goodness is necessary to apply the truth to life as is knowledge. This was a self-taught church (6:17), and the believers were able to instruct one another. "Admonish" or "instruct" means to inculcate (cf. Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:14).

"Morally, they were 'full of goodness,' intellectually they were 'complete in knowledge,' and functionally they were 'competent to instruct one another.'"⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰Mounce, p. 266.

- 15:15 The apostle gave his readers credit for some knowledge of what he had written in the foregoing chapters. Nevertheless they needed reminding as do all God's people.
- 15:16 Paul had a special obligation to this primarily Gentile congregation (1:13) since God had sent him to minister to Gentiles primarily. As a priest, it was his duty to bring people to God with the gospel. He regarded the Gentiles who were coming to faith and growing through his ministry as his offering to God. These Gentiles would be acceptable to God as the Holy Spirit set them apart to God as His possession (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11). Positional sanctification is in view rather than progressive sanctification.
- 15:17-18 Paul had grounds to boast because Gentiles had come to Jesus Christ through his ministry. Notwithstanding he gave all the credit for what had happened to Jesus Christ. He had worked through His servant to bring the Gentiles to obey God in word and deed.
- 15:19 Signs and wonders, standard biblical phraseology for miracles, accredited the messenger of God and validated the message that he proclaimed (Acts 2:22; 5:12).⁴⁰¹ The Holy Spirit enabled people to see the connection between the miracle and the message and therefore to believe the gospel and experience salvation.

Paul's arena of ministry when he wrote this epistle stretched about 1,400 miles from Jerusalem to the Roman province of Illyricum. Illyricum lay on the east side of the Adriatic Sea opposite Italy. This is modern northern Albania, much of Yugoslavia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. There is no record in Acts of Paul having gone there though he may have done so on the second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9) or during the third journey (Acts 21:1-2). Paul's claim to have "fully" preached the gospel means that he had faithfully proclaimed it in that area, not that he had personally delivered it to every individual.

⁴⁰¹See Ken L. Sarles, "An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):57-82.



15:20 This verse along with verses 18-19 explains why Paul had not yet been able to visit Rome. His desire to do pioneer missionary work grew out of his zeal to reach as many unsaved people as possible (cf. 1:14). Notice that he went to unreached people with the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20). He did not wait for them to come and enquire about it.

15:21 Paul seems to have found encouragement to pursue this goal in this prophecy from Isaiah, which describes the mission of the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 52:15).

2. Present program 15:22-29

15:22 This verse captures the point of what Paul explained in the preceding pericope.

15:23-24 The apostle felt that the Christians in the areas he had evangelized were in a good position to carry on the propagation of the gospel in their territories. Consequently he believed that he could look to comparatively unreached fields farther to the west in Europe (cf. 1:11-12).

"Parts of Spain (which in the ancient world included all the Iberian peninsula) had been occupied by Rome since about 200 B.C.; but it was only in Paul's lifetime that the Romans had fully organized the entire area."⁴⁰²

⁴⁰²Moo, p. 900.

- 15:25-26 The purpose of Paul's collection of money from the Macedonian and Achaian churches was to relieve the poverty that existed among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. A secondary purpose was to cement relations between Gentile and Jewish believers (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8—9).
- 15:27 The money that Paul was collecting was both a love-gift and an obligation. He could say that the givers owed it because the gospel had come from Jerusalem and Judea to the Gentiles. Believers in Asia Minor also contributed to this fund (1 Cor. 16:1; Acts 20:4).
- 15:28 Paul evidently anticipated the completion of this project eagerly. The money given was "fruit" in that it was the product of gospel seed-sowing. Paul as "apostle to the Gentiles" evidently wanted to seal it to the Jerusalem Christians by affirming its integrity and insuring that they understood it properly.⁴⁰³
- 15:29 The blessing of Jesus Christ in view was God's blessing on Paul by allowing him to reach Rome. The apostle probably also had in mind the blessing that would come to the Romans through his ministry among them. He did not know at this time that he would arrive in chains (Acts 28:15).

3. Future plans 15:30-33

- 15:30 Paul drew attention to the great need he felt for his readers' prayers by using the same term he did when appealing for them to dedicate themselves to God (12:1). He exhorted them on the basis of their relationship with Jesus Christ and the love that the Holy Spirit inspires. He realized that in view of the spiritual forces antagonistic to his ministry energetic praying was necessary (cf. Eph. 6:18-20; 2 Cor. 1:10-11).

". . . our praying must not be a casual experience that has no heart or earnestness. We should put as much fervor into our praying as a wrestler does into his wrestling!"⁴⁰⁴

- 15:31 He identified two immediate prayer requests. One was safety from the opposition of hostile unbelieving Jews (cf. Acts 9:29-30) and the distrust of Jewish Christians. The other was that the Jewish Christians would receive the monetary gift of their Gentile brethren. If they did not, the unity of the body would be in jeopardy.
- 15:32 The granting of these two requests would hopefully contribute to the realization of a third goal. This goal was Paul's joyful arrival in Rome in

⁴⁰³Ibid., pp. 906-7.

⁴⁰⁴Wiersbe, 1:565.

God's will (1:10) and his refreshment in the fellowship of the Roman saints.

15:33 Even though Paul's life was full of turmoil because of his ministry he wished the peace that comes from God as a special portion for the Roman church.

B. PERSONAL MATTERS CH. 16

This last chapter is very letter-like in its spontaneous arrangement of material. Paul evidently related matters as they occurred to him. He named 35 persons in this chapter. Nine of these people were with Paul, and the rest were in Rome. He identified 17 men and seven women. In addition he referred to at least two households (vv. 10-11) and three house churches (vv. 5, 14, 15) plus some other unnamed brethren (v. 14) and two other women (vv. 13, 15).⁴⁰⁵ Most of the names are Gentile, reflecting the mainly Gentile population of the church in Rome, and most are those of slaves and freedmen and freedwomen.⁴⁰⁶

"This sixteenth chapter is neglected by many to their own loss. It is by far the most extensive, intimate and particular of all the words of loving greeting in Paul's marvelous letters. No one can afford to miss this wonderful outpouring of the heart of our apostle toward the saints whom he so loved—which means all the real Church of God!"⁴⁰⁷

". . . Paul's extensive request for greetings in Rom. 16 may reflect his desire to mention all the Christians in Rome he knows—a procedure plainly impossible in those letters directed to churches where he has ministered."⁴⁰⁸

". . . Paul was a friend maker as well as a soul winner. He did not try to live an isolated life; he had friends in the Lord, and he appreciated them."⁴⁰⁹

1. A commendation 16:1-2

Phoebe was evidently the woman who carried this epistle from Corinth to Rome. She was a "servant" (Gr. *diakonon*) of the church in her hometown, Cenchrea, the port of Corinth (Acts 18:18; 2 Cor. 1:1). It is unclear whether Phoebe held office as a deaconess⁴¹⁰ or whether she was simply an informal servant of the church. Paul stressed her service, not

⁴⁰⁵The households may be house churches too.

⁴⁰⁶See P. Lampe, "The Roman Christians in Romans 16," in *The Romans Debate*, pp. 227-29.

⁴⁰⁷Newell, p. 548.

⁴⁰⁸Moo, p. 917.

⁴⁰⁹Wiersbe, 1:565.

⁴¹⁰Moo, p. 914.

her office.⁴¹¹ She was his sister in the Lord as seems clear from his referring to her as "our" sister. Letters of commendation were common in Paul's day (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1). Paul's words here constituted such a letter for Phoebe.

Notice that the ministry of women in the Roman church is quite evident in this chapter. Paul referred to nine prominent women: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Tryphena, Thyphosa, Persis, Rufus' mother, Julia, and Nereus' sister.

2. Various greetings to Christians in Rome 16:3-16

It may seem unusual that Paul knew so many people by name in the church in Rome since he had never visited it. However travel in the Roman Empire was fairly easy during Paul's lifetime. Probably he had met some of these people elsewhere and knew others of them by reputation.

Most of the names are Latin or Greek, but some of these people were evidently Jews who, as Paul, also had Greek or Latin names (e.g., vv. 7, 11). In his epistles Paul greeted more individuals by name in the churches he had not visited than in those that he had (cf. Col.). He may have wanted to establish more personal contact with congregations that had not seen his face.

- 16:3-5a Paul met Prisca (Priscilla) and her husband Aquila in Corinth (Acts 18:2). When he left for Ephesus, he took them with him (Acts 18:18). He left them in Ephesus when he moved on to Jerusalem (Acts 18:19). In Ephesus they helped Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). Later they returned to Rome where they had lived previously (Acts 18:2). Later still they returned to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19). Churches normally met in houses at this time (cf. v. 23; 1 Cor. 16:19).
- 16:5b-7 Most of the people mentioned in these verses require no explanatory comment. "Asia" (v. 5) was the Roman province of Asia of which Ephesus was the capital. Junias (or Junia, v. 7) was probably the wife of Andronicus (cf. vv. 3, 15). The term "kinsmen" or "relatives" (v. 7; cf. vv. 11, 21) seems to refer to relatives of Paul who were probably fellow Jews (cf. Phil. 3:7). "Apostles" (v. 7) here must have the general sense of representatives (traveling missionaries) rather than being a technical reference to one of the 13 apostles (cf. Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; 1 Thess. 2:7; Phil. 2:25).
- 16:8-15 Those of the household of Aristobulus (v. 10) were probably his slaves. Since Paul did not greet Aristobulus himself this man may have been an unbeliever. Tryphena (v. 12, "dainty") and Tryphosa ("delicate") may have been sisters. Rufus (v. 13) may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross (cf. Mark 15:21). Rufus' mother may have been

⁴¹¹The Greek word *prostatis*, "helper," occurs only here in the New Testament and probably means a helper in the sense of a benefactor or patron.

Paul's in that she had at one time acted as a mother to him. It is unlikely that he would have referred to her as he did if she had been his physical mother.

"Let Christian mothers find here a great field for that wonderful heart of instinctive loving care given by God to mothers,—that they extend their maternal care beyond their own family circle, to all Christians, and especially to all laborers for Christ. The Lord will remember it at His coming!"⁴¹²

"The brethren [or saints] with them" (vv. 14, 15) probably refers to the other Christians who met with those named in a house church.

16:16 The "holy kiss" was and is a common affectionate greeting expressing mutual love in Christ. Paul relayed the greetings of all the churches he represented.

Since Paul acknowledged his co-workers (vv. 3, 9; cf. v. 7) we know that he was not a "lone ranger" minister. The number of women mentioned in these verses argues against the view of some that Paul was a woman-hater. Obviously women played important roles in the ministry of the early church.

3. A warning 16:17-20

Again Paul introduced his comments with a strong exhortation (cf. 12:1; 15:30). He warned the Roman Christians about false teachers who might enter the fold. His brief warning argues against thinking that false teachers were presently active in the church.

16:17-18 False teachers were a danger to all the churches. Paul urged his Roman readers to avoid them.⁴¹³

16:19 Paul was confident that his readers could handle this threat because they had a reputation for following the apostles' instructions. The innocent among God's people tend to accept false teachers, and the wise normally reject them. Paul wanted his readers to be wise concerning all good and innocent only regarding evil (cf. Matt. 10:16).

16:20 Satan is behind all evil ultimately. God desires peace among His people, not the antagonism that some in the church who chose to follow Satan's spokesmen would create. "Soon" does not imply that Jesus Christ would return soon necessarily. Paul meant that the Roman Christians would

⁴¹²Newell, p. 554.

⁴¹³See Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):205-7.

frustrate Satan's work among them soon as they rejected false teachers. His terminology suggests that he had Genesis 3:15 in mind.

Paul's benediction magnified God's grace as does this whole epistle. Usually such a benediction signalled the end of a Pauline letter, but the apostle had more to communicate in this instance.

4. Greetings from Paul's companions 16:21-24

The men whom Paul mentioned in verse 21 all seem to have been his fellow missionaries who were working with him in Corinth when he wrote this epistle. Lucius may have been Luke, the writer of Luke and Acts.⁴¹⁴ Jason (v. 21) may have been Paul's host in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:5-9). Sosipater (v. 21) was probably Sopater of Berea who accompanied Paul when he left Greece toward the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). Tertius (v. 22) was his amanuensis who wrote down this epistle for Paul. The men in verse 23 were evidently all Corinthian believers.

5. A doxology 16:25-27

The apostle brought together words and ideas from his earlier epistles as well as from this one in this doxology.

- 16:25 The apostle was confident that God could do for his readers what they needed (cf. 1:11; Eph. 3:20). The gospel is God's chief tool to that end. "My gospel" identifies the one that Paul had preached widely and had expounded in this epistle. The "preaching of Jesus Christ" is another name for the gospel that stresses its subject, Jesus Christ. Proclamation follows revelation. The gospel had been hidden in eternity past until God revealed it first in the Old Testament and then fully in the New.
- 16:26 Even though the Old Testament prophets revealed the gospel they did not always grasp all of its implications (1 Pet. 1:10-12; cf. Rom. 1:2). The commandment of God in view is probably the expression of God's will.
- 16:27 As the only God, He is the God of both Jews and Gentiles (cf. 3:29-30). As the wise God, He is the author of the plan of salvation for all mankind that Paul had expounded (cf. 11:33). God is worthy of all glory because of who He is and what He has done. Our access to Him is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

This doxology is similar to the others in 8:31-39 and 11:33-36.

⁴¹⁴See John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):38-41.

Appendix

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	Event	Reference
	Birth in Tarsus	Acts 22:3
	Early life and theological education in Jerusalem under Gamaliel	Acts 22:3
34	Participation in Stephen's stoning outside Jerusalem	Acts 7:57—8:1
34	Leadership in the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem	Acts 9:1
34	Leadership in the persecution of Christians beyond Jerusalem to Damascus	Acts 9:2
34	Conversion on the road to Damascus	Acts 9:3-17
34	Baptism in Damascus	Acts 9:18
34	Preaching in Damascus	Acts 9:19-22
34	Trip to Arabia	Gal. 1:17
34	Return to Damascus	Gal. 1:17
37	Trip to Jerusalem	Acts 9:26; Gal. 1:18
37	Meeting with Peter and James and preaching in Jerusalem	Acts 9:27-29; Gal. 1:18-19
37	Trip to Tarsus via Caesarea	Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21
37-43	Ministry in and around Tarsus	Acts 11:25
37-43	Caught up to the third heaven	2 Cor. 12:2-4
43	Move to Antioch of Syria on Barnabas' invitation	Acts 11:26
43	Ministry in Antioch of Syria	Acts 11:26
47	Trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus to deliver a famine relief gift	Acts 11:30; Gal. 2:1-10
47	Return to Antioch	Acts 12:25

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	Event	Reference
47-48	Continued ministry in Antioch	Acts 13:1-3
48-49	First missionary journey with Barnabas and John Mark	Acts 13:4—14:27
48	Ministry in Cyprus	Acts 13:4-12
48	Voyage to Asia Minor	Acts 13:13
48	Separation from John Mark who departed at Perga	Acts 13:13
48	Ministry at Pisidian Antioch	Acts 13:14-52
48-49	Ministry at Iconium	Acts 14:1-7
49	Ministry at Lystra	Acts 14:8-19
49	Ministry at Derbe	Acts 14:20-23
49	Return to Attalia	Acts 14:24-25
49	Return to Syrian Antioch	Acts 14:26
49	Ministry in Syrian Antioch	Acts 14:27-15:2
49	Rebuke of Peter	Gal. 2:11-14
49	Writing of Galatians	
49	Trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas via Phoenicia and Samaria	Acts 15:3
49	Jerusalem Council	Acts 15:4-29
49	Return to Syrian Antioch with Barnabas, Silas, and Judas	Acts 15:22, 30
49	Separation from Silas and Judas who returned to Jerusalem	Acts 15:31-33
49-50	Ministry in Syrian Antioch	Acts 15:35
50	Division of opinion with Barnabas over John Mark	Acts 15:36-39
50	Separation from Barnabas and John Mark who returned to Cyprus	Acts 15:39
50-52	Second missionary journey with Silas and others	Acts 15:40—18:22
50	Ministry in Syria and Cilicia	Acts 15:41

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	Event	Reference
50	Ministry in Derbe and Lystra	Acts 16:1
50	Partnership with Timothy who joined Paul and Silas	Acts 16:2-3
50	Ministry in other Galatian churches	Acts 16:4-6
50	Exclusion from Asia and Bithynia	Acts 16:7-8
50	Macedonian vision at Troas	Acts 16:9-10
50	Voyage from Troas to Samothrace to Neapolis with Luke	Acts 16:11
50	Ministry in Philippi	Acts 16:12-40
50	Separation from Luke who remained at Philippi	
50-51	Ministry in Thessalonica	Acts 17:1-9
51	Ministry in Berea	Acts 17:10-15
51	Separation from Silas and Timothy who remained in Berea	Acts 17:14
51	Ministry in Athens	Acts 17:16-34
51	Ministry in Corinth	Acts 18:1-17
51	Association with Aquilla and Priscilla	Acts 18:2-3
51	Reunion with Silas and Timothy	Acts 18:4
51	Writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians	
52	Trip to Ephesus with Aquilla and Priscilla	Acts 18:18
52	Separation from Aquilla and Priscilla who proceeded to Syria	Acts 18:18-19
52	Ministry in Ephesus	Acts 18:19-21

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	Event	Reference
52	Return to Syrian Antioch via Caesarea and Jerusalem	Acts 18:21-22
52-53	Layover in Syrian Antioch	Acts 18:23
53-57	Third missionary journey	Acts 18:23—21:19
53	Ministry in Galatia	Acts 18:23; 19:1
53	Apollos' ministry in Ephesus	Acts 18:24
53	Aquila and Priscilla's ministry to Apollos	Acts 18:26
53	Apollos' ministry in Achaia	Acts 18:27-28
53-56	Ministry in Ephesus and Asia	Acts 19:1—20:1
53-56	Writing of the "former letter" to Corinth	1 Cor. 5:9
56	Writing of 1 Corinthians	
56	The "painful visit" to Corinth and return	2 Cor., 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2
56	Writing of the "severe letter" to Corinth	2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18
56	Sending of Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia	Acts 19:22
56	Trip to Troas from Ephesus	
56	Wait for Titus	
56	Trip to Macedonia from Troas	Acts 20:1
56	Reunion with Titus in Macedonia	
56	Writing of 2 Corinthians	
56	Ministry in Macedonia	Acts 20:2
56	Ministry in Greece (Achaia and Corinth)	Acts 20:2-3
56-57	Writing of Romans	

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	Event	Reference
57	Return to Macedonia and Philippi with Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, and Luke	Acts 20:3-4
57	Trip of his companions except Luke to Troas	Acts 20:5
57	Trip to Troas with Luke	Acts 20:6
57	Ministry at Troas	Acts 20:7-12
57	Trip to Assos by land while Luke and another brother travel by ship	Acts 20:13
57	Trip to Miletus by ship with Luke and the other brother	Acts 20:14-16
57	Ministry at Miletus	Acts 20:17-38
57	Trip from Miletus to Caesarea with Luke and the other brother via Tyre	Acts 21:1-7
57	Ministry at Caesarea	Acts 21:8-14
57	Trip to Jerusalem	Acts 21:15-16
57	Ministry at Jerusalem	Acts 21:17—23:30
57	Report to the church	Acts 21:17-26
57	Arrest in the temple	Acts 21:27-40
57	Speech in the temple courtyard	Acts 22:1-21
57	Imprisonment in Jerusalem	Acts 22:22—23:30
57	Trip to Caesarea	Acts 23:31-35
57-59	Ministry in Caesarea	Acts 24:1—26:32
57	Defense before Felix	Acts 24:1-27
59	Defense before Festus	Acts 25:1-12
59	Defense before Agrippa and Festus	Acts 26:1-32
59-60	Journey to Rome with Luke and Aristarchus	Acts 27:1—28:15
59	Trip to Crete	Acts 27:1-8
59	Shipwreck	Acts 27:9-44
59-60	Ministry on Malta	Acts 28:1-10

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	Event	Reference
60	Trip from Malta to Rome	Acts 28:11-15
60-62	Ministry in Rome	Acts 28:15-31
60-62	Writing of the Prison Epistles	
62	Release from Rome	
62	Return to the Aegean area	
62-66	Writing of 1 Timothy and Titus	
67	Arrest	
67-68	Imprisonment in Rome	
67	Writing of 2 Timothy	
68	Martyrdom in Rome	

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