

# Notes on Romans

2014 Edition

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## Introduction

### WRITER

Throughout the history of the church, from post-apostolic times to the present, Christians have regarded Romans as having been one of the Apostle Paul's epistles.<sup>1</sup> 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 (A.D. 34), Paul preached in Damascus, spent some time in Arabia, and then returned to Damascus. Next he traveled to Jerusalem where he met briefly with Peter and James. He then moved on to Tarsus, which was evidently his base of operations from where he ministered for about six years (A.D. 37-43). In response to an invitation from Barnabas, he moved to Antioch of Syria where he served for about five years (A.D. 43-48). He and Barnabas then set out on their so-called first missionary journey into Asia Minor (A.D. 48-49). Returning to Antioch, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians to strengthen the churches that he and Barnabas had just planted in Asia Minor (A.D. 49). After the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Paul took Silas and began his second missionary journey (A.D. 50-52) through Asia Minor, and further westward into the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. From Corinth, Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians (A.D. 51). He then proceeded to Ephesus by ship, and finished the second journey at Syrian Antioch. From there he set out on his third missionary journey (A.D. 53-57). Passing through Asia Minor, he arrived in Ephesus where he labored for three years (A.D. 53-56). During this time he wrote 1 Corinthians (A.D. 56). Finally, Paul left Ephesus and traveled by land to Macedonia, where he wrote 2 Corinthians (A.D. 56). He continued south and spent the winter of A.D. 56-57 in Corinth. There he wrote the Epistle to the Romans, and sent it by Phoebe (16:1-2) to the Roman church.<sup>2</sup>

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 (A.D. 57). Three years later he arrived in Rome as a prisoner, where he ministered for two years (A.D. 60-62). During this two-year time, Paul wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). The Romans freed Paul, and he returned to the Aegean area. There he

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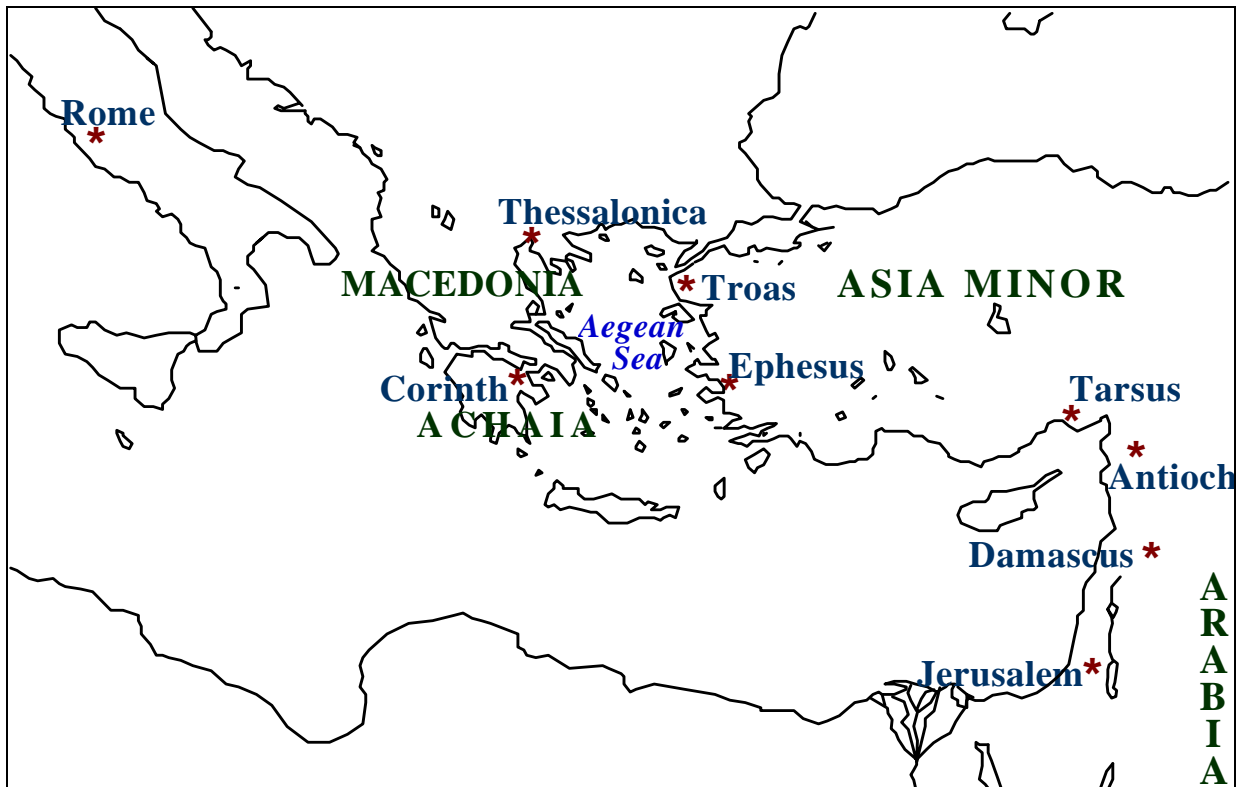
<sup>1</sup>See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1:1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 497.

wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, was arrested again, suffered imprisonment in Rome a second time, wrote 2 Timothy, and finally died as a martyr under Nero in A.D. 68.<sup>3</sup>

### RECIPIENTS

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.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that these Jews became believers in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:10), or at some other time quite early in the church's history.<sup>5</sup> By the time Paul wrote Romans, the church in Rome was famous throughout the Roman Empire for its faith (1:8).



"The greeting in Romans does not imply a strongly knit church organization, and chapter 16 gives a picture of small groups of believers rather than of one large group."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>See the appendix "Sequence of Paul's Activities" at the end of these notes for more details.

<sup>4</sup>William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. xxv.

<sup>5</sup>Conybeare, p. 498.

<sup>6</sup>A. Berkeley Mickelsen, "Romans," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1179.

## PURPOSES

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this epistle for several reasons.<sup>7</sup> First, he wanted to prepare the way for his intended visit to the church (15:22-24). Second, he evidently hoped that Rome would become a base of operations and support for his pioneer missionary work in Spain, as well as the western portions of the empire that he had not yet evangelized. His full exposition of the gospel in this letter would have provided a solid foundation for the Roman Christians' 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). Third, 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).

"He felt that the best protection against the infection of false teaching was the antiseptic of the truth."<sup>8</sup>

Paul also wrote Romans 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 in case 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."<sup>9</sup>

## GENRE

Twenty-one of the 27 New Testament books are letters, and they compose about 35 percent of the New Testament. Paul wrote 13 of these letters, making him the most prolific New Testament letter writer. Paul's letters make up about one-quarter of the New Testament. He wrote more of the New Testament than anyone except Luke.

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<sup>7</sup>See 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.

<sup>8</sup>William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, p. xxii.

<sup>9</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 20.

"While letters were by no means unknown in the world of the ancient Near East (see, e.g., 2 Sam. 11:14-15; Ezra 4—5), it was in the Greco-Roman world that the letter became an established and popular method of communication."<sup>10</sup>

Greco-Roman letters typically contained an address and greeting, a body, and a conclusion. Christian letters, additionally, usually contained a doxology or benediction after the conclusion.

Adolf Deissmann distinguished between "letters" (unstudied, private communications) and "epistles" (carefully composed, public pieces of literature).<sup>11</sup> This rigid distinction is no longer popular since most scholars view these categories as representing the polar extremes on a continuum. Both secular and inspired correspondences fall somewhere in between. Romans is closer to Deissmann's "epistle" category than to his "letter" category.

Letters were not a typical method of religious instruction in Judaism. New Testament letter writers evidently adopted this method of instruction for two main reasons. As the church grew fast and spread from Jerusalem to many distant places, its leaders needed a method that enabled them to communicate at a distance. Also, letters enabled the apostles to convey a sense of personal immediacy and establish their personal presence with the converts.<sup>12</sup>

### **CHARACTERISTICS**

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.<sup>13</sup> 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, this church 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.

Romans is the longest of Paul's epistles with 7,114 words. It may have been placed first in the collection of Paul's epistles in the New Testament because of its length, which seems probable, or because of its importance.

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<sup>10</sup>Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 332.

<sup>11</sup>Adolf Deissmann, "Prolegomena to the Biblical Letters and Epistles," in *Bible Studies*, pp. 1-59.

<sup>12</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 331.

<sup>13</sup>For further 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.

**VALUE**

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."<sup>14</sup>

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."<sup>15</sup>

**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

<sup>14</sup>Quoted by F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup>Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle to the Romans" (1522), cited by Moo, p. 22.

- 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 restorative effects 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

### **MESSAGE**

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." Martin 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." And Frederick Godet, the French commentator, described it as "the cathedral of the Christian faith."<sup>16</sup>

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. "Cosmology" is the study of the nature and principles of the universe.

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<sup>16</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:93.

By the way, there is now what some have called the "new perspective on Paul," which some writers on Paul have advocated in recent years. These scholars believe that Paul's Greco-Roman culture influenced the apostle more than his Jewish background and the Old Testament. This has led to some reinterpreting of Paul's writings. Advocates of the "new perspective" include E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, the writer of the Word Biblical Commentary on Romans, N. T. Wright, who has written many books on Pauline theology, and others. Some evangelical scholars have accepted their theories, though I have not. The result of the "new perspective" is a departure from traditionally held interpretations of many Pauline texts. The reading that I have done on this theory has not convinced me that Paul was more influenced by his Greco-Roman culture than by his Jewish background and the Old Testament, though his secular culture did have some influence on him.<sup>17</sup>

First among his presuppositions, 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 was that he is subject to God's government of the universe. Paul believed that man has received a measure of freedom from God, so he can choose to pursue sin. However, if he does, he is still in the sovereign hand of God. God allows 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.

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 descendants, 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 especially 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 of his reasoning in Romans rests.

Romans may not be the best biblical book to put in the hands of most unsaved people to lead them 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 their salvation. By the way, "salvation" is an umbrella term: it covers many aspects of

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<sup>17</sup>See James E. Allman, "Gaining Perspective on the New Perspective on Paul," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:677 (January-March 2013):51-68, for an introduction to and evaluation of the views set forth by Sanders, Wright, and Dunn.



deliverance, including justification, sanctification, glorification, redemption, propitiation, et al.<sup>18</sup>

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. But if you keep reading, you will conclude from 3:21 on that we have the best, most wonderful news that anyone has 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 parts 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 reasoning, 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.

A former student of mine came to Christ by looking through his microscope. He was a research scientist, and he concluded that what he was observing could not have come into existence accidentally. He believed that an intelligent Creator must have been responsible, and this was the first step in his journey toward becoming a Christian. His was not the typical conclusion (cf. Matt. 16:17). Most people reject the evidence of God's existence that He has built into His creation.

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 in one sense 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 in the very first sentence of his letter (1:3-4). God declared to everyone that the Jesus of the Gospels is His Son by resurrecting Him from the dead.

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<sup>18</sup>See Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation*.

Two words describe Christ's relation to the divine plan of salvation: manifestation, and propitiation (satisfaction). To "propitiate" means to satisfy the demands of God's righteous standards. The righteousness manifested in Christ is available to people through His propitiation. God's righteousness is available to everyone, because Jesus died as the perfect offering for sin that satisfied the demands of a holy God completely. 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. To justify means to pardon and forgive sinners of their guilt and to declare them righteous. Salvation also involves practical 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 (5:12-21). In practical 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: First, God restores creation's king, man, to his intended position. Second, creation realizes all of its intended possibilities that sin has denied it.

Consider next some of the major 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 humankind in the incarnation of Christ than He ever had been before. Yet, in the Incarnation, the nearness of God became more obvious to people. In His 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, and relying on it as true.

Third, Romans calls us to dedicate ourselves to God, rather than living self-centered lives (6:12-13; 12:1). This is the reasonable response to having received salvation as a gift. 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 therefore unsaved. Rather, he appealed to us as saved people to do for God what He has done for us, namely: give 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 the following 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 view of the greatness of the salvation that God has provided, which Romans reveals, Christians, like 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).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Adapted from Morgan, 2:1:93-109.

## 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)."<sup>20</sup>

### 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). 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, perhaps because 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 "bondservant" (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.

"He regarded himself as the purchased possession of his Lord and Master. The two ideas of property and service are suggested. There was no serfdom or servility, and yet there was an absolute loyalty in the consciousness of absolute possession. The bond-servant owned nothing, and was nothing, apart from his master. His time, his strength, everything belonged altogether to another. There was nothing nobler to St. Paul than to be a slave of the Lord Jesus. He desired to be nothing, to do nothing, to own nothing apart from Him."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Moo, p. 39. See *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 439, for a chart comparing Paul's introductions to his epistles.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas, pp. 38-39.

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).<sup>22</sup>

"'Called' means designated and set apart by an action of God to some special sphere and manner of being and of consequent activity."<sup>23</sup>

"Paul never thought of himself as a man who had aspired to an honour; he thought of himself as a man who had been given a task."<sup>24</sup>

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 previously, Paul had lived a life set apart to strictly observing the Mosaic Law and Jewish customs. *Now* his calling was to proclaim "the gospel" (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:12).

"Concentration thus follows consecration and commission."<sup>25</sup>

## **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 was the reason Paul appealed to the Old Testament so fully, in this and others 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 (descendant) 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

<sup>22</sup>See R. D. Culver, "Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:534 (April-June 1977):131-43.

<sup>23</sup>William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 3. Italics removed.

<sup>24</sup>Barclay, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup>Thomas, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup>James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 24-25; Bruce, p. 69.

be His powerful Son, rather than that 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 must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."<sup>27</sup>

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 was elevated in status and function. God appointed the Son to a new and more powerful position in relation to the world at the Resurrection (cf. Matt. 28:18). He is now not only the Messiah, but the "Lord" of all.<sup>28</sup>

To what does "the Spirit of holiness" (v. 4) refer? It may be another way of referring to the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, 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.<sup>30</sup>

1:5 Paul probably meant that he had received the special "grace" (gift) of being an apostle (his "apostleship"). He introduced the character and scope of what follows, in this epistle, by linking his "apostleship" with the resurrected Christ. Jesus' descent from David, plus His resurrection from death, proved that He was the same Messiah and Lord promised in the Old Testament. Therefore, the gospel that Paul preached as an apostle could bring "all" people ("the Gentiles"), 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.

"The law lays down what a man must do; the gospel lays down what God has done."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup>See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Jesus That Paul Preached," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:510 (April-June 1971):120-34.

<sup>29</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 19; F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 80; Bruce, p. 69; John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 440.

<sup>30</sup>Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 15; Sanday and Headlam, p. 9; Stifler, p. 25; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:324.

<sup>31</sup>Barclay, p. 3.

"Someone has truly said that the Gospel is 'good news' not 'good advice,' . . ." <sup>32</sup>

"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. <sup>33</sup>

### **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, "saints" being a common term for believers in the New Testament. It refers more to position than condition when used this way, though the implication of holiness is strong. We are primarily saints even though we sin. <sup>34</sup>

"God's call is not an invitation but a powerful and effective reaching out to claim individuals for himself." <sup>35</sup>

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. <sup>36</sup>

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.

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup>See Robert N. Wilkin, "Obedience to the Faith: Romans 1:5," *Grace in Focus* 10:6 (November-December 1995):2-4.

<sup>34</sup>See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12.

<sup>35</sup>Robert 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.

<sup>36</sup>Sanday and Headlam, p. 16.

"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)."<sup>37</sup>

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 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*, cf. 1 Thess. 5:17) 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."<sup>38</sup>

1:11-13 As Paul had prayed often for the Romans, so he had also "planned" often to visit them. The phrase "I do not want you to be unaware" always identifies something important that Paul proceeded to say (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:13). His reason for planning to visit was for fellowship ("encouraged together . . . by the other's faith"), namely, mutual sharing of things profitable. One obstacle that may have prevented Paul from reaching Rome previously was the imperial edict of A.D. 49: expelling Jews from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2).<sup>39</sup> Paul mentioned his contribution to the Romans first (v. 11), and theirs to him last (v. 13), while 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). In 1 Corinthians 12:1 he mentioned specific gifts (plural). We should also probably interpret the "fruit" he hoped to obtain (v. 13) broadly, rather than specifically, as either the fruit of his evangelism among them or financial support.

<sup>37</sup>Mounce, p. 65. Cf. Cranfield, 1:78-79.

<sup>38</sup>Mounce, p. 66.

<sup>39</sup>See Bruce, p. 16.



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 they possess, and can share, what can impart life to those who are dead in sin, namely: the gospel.

The terms "Greek" and "Barbarian" (v. 14) distinguish Gentiles by language and culture. In Paul's day, this was a standard way of describing all races and classes within the Gentile world.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.

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."<sup>42</sup>

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 evangelize sinners. Verses 8-15 play an integral part in introducing the argument and rhetoric of Romans.<sup>43</sup>

### **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. This is an example of the figure of speech called *litotes*, in which one sets forth a positive idea ("I am proud of the gospel") by expressing its negative opposite ("I am not ashamed of the gospel") to

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<sup>40</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:33.

<sup>41</sup>J. P. Lange, "The Epistle of Paul to the Romans," in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup>Harrison, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup>Marty 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.

stress the positive idea. The reason for Paul's proud confidence 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 effect 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!"<sup>44</sup>

God has the power to deliver physically (Exod. 14:13) and spiritually (Ps. 51:12, 14). 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.

"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!"<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup>

"The only way to a right relationship with God is to take God at His word, and to cast oneself, just as one is, on the mercy and the love of God. It is the way of faith. It is to know that the important thing is, not what we can do for God, but what God has done for us. For Paul the centre of the Christian faith was that we can never earn or deserve

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<sup>44</sup>Mounce, p. 70.

<sup>45</sup>Newell, p. 18. He did not identify the source of his quotation.

<sup>46</sup>See J. Ronald Blue, "Untold Billions: Are They Really Lost?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:562 (October-December 1981):338-50; and Ramesh P. Richard, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):85-108.

<sup>47</sup>See Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 201-17.

the favour of God, nor do we need to. The whole matter is a matter of grace, and all that we can do is to accept in wondering love and gratitude and trust what God has done for us. But that does not free us from obligations or entitle us to do as we like; it means that for ever and for ever we must try to be worthy of the love which does so much for us. But there is a change in life. We are no longer trying to fulfil [*sic*] the demands of stern and austere and condemnatory law; we are not like criminals before a judge any more; we are lovers who have given all life in love to the one who first loved us."<sup>48</sup>

The gospel has a special relevance to the Jew. We could translate "first" (NASB, Gr. *protos*) as "preeminently" (cf. 2:9-10). This preeminence is due to the fact that God chose the Jews to be the people through whom the gospel would reach the Gentiles (cf. Gen. 12:3). As a people, the Jews have a leading place in God's plans involving salvation for the rest of humanity (cf. chs. 9—11). Their priority is primarily elective rather than historical or methodological.<sup>49</sup> 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 1:11) and following His ascension (Acts 1:8; 3:26). Paul also followed this pattern in his ministry (Acts 13:45-46; 28:25, 28). Furthermore, Israel must repent before the messianic kingdom will begin (Zech. 12:10).<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the Great Commission makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the present age. 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.

"In view of chapters nine to eleven it is hardly admissible to explain this *proton* as referring merely to the historical fact that the gospel was preached to the Jews before it was preached to the Gentiles, or, while allowing a reference to the special position of the Jews in the *Heilsgeschichte* [history of salvation], to cite Gal 3.28 and Eph 2.14f as proof that this *proton* is, in Paul's view, something now abolished, as Nygren does.<sup>51</sup> Rather must we see it in the light of Paul's confident statement in 11.29 that *ametameleta . . . ta charismata kai he klesis tou theou* [the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable]."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Barclay, p. xxvi.

<sup>49</sup>See Wayne A. Brindle, "'To the Jew First': Rhetoric, Strategy, History, or Theology?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:634 (April-June 2002):221-33.

<sup>50</sup>See Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, "No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God's Promised Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):145-46.

<sup>51</sup>Footnote 3: A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup>Cranfield, 1:91.

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"? With the exception of 2 Corinthians 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]). 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.

"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*."<sup>53</sup>

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*, which views "from" as a point of departure. Instead he used *ek*, which 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, and whomever we may be. 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 (past salvation from the penalty of sin), practical sanctification (present salvation from the power of sin), or glorification (future 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). Martin Luther wrote the following about this verse:

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<sup>53</sup>Moo, p. 74. See pages 70-74 for the reasons this is the best conclusion. He also wrote a good excursus on "'Righteousness' Language in Paul," pp. 79-90.

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven."<sup>54</sup>

Many students of Romans believe that Habakkuk 2:4 is the "text" of Romans, and what follows is exposition of that Scripture text. Thomas suggested the following outline: 1:1—3:20: the righteous; 3:21—4:25: by faith; and 5:1—16:26: shall live.<sup>55</sup>

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 righteously makes people righteous. The theme of the gospel is the righteousness of God, and the theme of Romans is the gospel.<sup>56</sup>

"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 accord of all this with the Old Testament Scriptures: 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"<sup>57</sup>

This first section of Romans (1:1-17) introduces the subject of this epistolary 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 showed that everyone is a sinner, and is therefore subject to God's condemnation.

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<sup>54</sup>Martin Luther, quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>55</sup>Thomas, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup>Moo, pp. 22-30, Witmer, p. 437.

<sup>57</sup>Newell, p. 18.

". . . we cannot seriously aspire to him [i.e., God] before we begin to become displeased with ourselves."<sup>58</sup>

Paul began by demonstrating the need of all people generally (1:18-32). Then he dealt more particularly with people who would resist this verdict, namely: self-righteous people (2:1—3:8). He explained three principles by which God will judge everyone (2:1-16). Then he zeroed in on the hardest of all cases: the Jews (2:17-29). He answered four objections the Jews might raise to God's condemning them (3:1-8). Finally, he supported the fact that all people are under God's condemnation by citing Old Testament Scripture (3:9-20). All of this shows that everyone needs to hear the gospel and believe it (1:16-17).

"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."<sup>59</sup>

### **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.

"God never condemns without just cause. Here three bases are stated for His judgment of the pagan world.

- a. For suppressing God's truth (1:18) . . .
- b. For ignoring God's revelation (1:19-20) . . .
- c. For perverting God's glory (1:21-23) . . ."<sup>60</sup>

#### **1. The reason for human guilt 1:18**

In this verse Paul began to explain why Gentiles need to hear the gospel and experience salvation. Whereas this verse gives one reason, it also serves as a general statement that summarizes human guilt.

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<sup>58</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:1:1.

<sup>59</sup>Moo, p. 92.

<sup>60</sup>Witmer, p. 442.

God has "revealed" His "wrath" as well as His righteousness (v. 17), "from heaven," in the gospel message.<sup>61</sup> As Paul would explain, the unfolding of history also reveals God's hatred toward sin and His judgment of sin. The moral devolution of humanity 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 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.<sup>62</sup>

"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."<sup>63</sup>

"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 not loving. Together these two words show humankind's failure to love God and other people as we should, which are our two greatest responsibilities (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."<sup>64</sup>

Even if someone acknowledges God for who He is, he still does not honor God as much as he should. Every person suppresses the revelation of God, and approves of those who practice evil, to some extent.

## **2. The ungodliness of mankind 1:19-27**

Verse 18 identifies man's ungodliness and unrighteousness as the targets of God's wrath. Paul explained "ungodliness" in 1:19-27, and "unrighteousness" in 1:28-32. Some people are more ungodly and unrighteous than others, but all are ungodly and unrighteous.

1:19-20        These verses begin a discussion of "natural revelation." Verse 19 states the fact of natural revelation, and verse 20 explains the process.<sup>65</sup> Natural revelation describes what everyone knows about God because of what

<sup>61</sup>Cranfield, 1:109-10. See René A. López, "Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15:29 (Autumn 2002):45-66.

<sup>62</sup>G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 219. See the excursus on the wrath of God in Romans in Newell, pp. 40-46.

<sup>63</sup>Mounce, pp. 76-77.

<sup>64</sup>Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>65</sup>Witmer, p. 442.

God has revealed concerning Himself in nature.<sup>66</sup> It is truth ("that which is known") about God that is immediately "evident" to every human being. Paul was not referring to the truth that man has been able to discover through various disciplines of study (e.g., DNA). What God has revealed about Himself in Scripture is "special revelation." The creation bears testimony to its Maker, and every human being "hears" this silent witness (cf. Ps. 19).<sup>67</sup> That is, it is observable, not audible.

"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!'"<sup>68</sup>

Four things characterize this revelation. First, it is a clear testimony; everyone is aware of it ("it is evident [plain]"). Second, everyone can understand it ("being understood through what has been made"). We can draw conclusions about the Creator from His creation. "His invisible attributes . . . have been clearly seen" is an oxymoron. Third, this revelation 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 divine nature).

"This is the only New Testament instance of *theiotes*, 'divinity', 'divine nature' (NIV). If God's divinity is shown in creation, his full deity or divine essence (*theotes*) is embodied in Christ (Col. 2:9)."<sup>69</sup>

Natural revelation tells people that there is a Supreme Being, and it makes man responsible to respond to his Creator in worship and submission.<sup>70</sup> 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."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>See Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ch. 5: "General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics," pp. 113-40.

<sup>67</sup>See Bruce A. Baker, "Romans 1:18-21 and Presuppositional Apologetics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):280-98.

<sup>68</sup>Newell, p. 29.

<sup>69</sup>Bruce, p. 80.

<sup>70</sup>See Ronald E. Mann, "False and True Worship in Romans 1:18-25," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:625 (January-March 2000):26-34.

<sup>71</sup>Newell, p. 27.



Paul did not explain exactly *how* God reveals Himself in nature, and there have been three popular explanations. One is that He left behind clues or "tracks" in creation from which everyone can reason that there is a Creator. Another explanation is that God personally reveals His presence to everyone through the medium of creation. Still another view is that everyone has a vague awareness of God, because we recognize that we are finite creatures living in a contingent world. None of these views is demonstrably certain, and all of them have problems. More than one may be true.<sup>72</sup> But there is no question *that* God has revealed Himself in nature.

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. When people reject truth, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to recognize and receive truth.

Whenever human wisdom sets itself against God, the result is soon seen in human foolishness."<sup>73</sup>

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 developed 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."<sup>74</sup>

"They [i.e., many unbelievers] will not say it is by chance that they are distinct from brute creatures. Yet they set God aside, the while using 'nature,' which for them is the artificer of all things, as a cloak. They see such exquisite workmanship in their individual members from mouth and eyes even to their very toenails. Here also they substitute nature for God."<sup>75</sup>

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

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<sup>72</sup>For a discussion of them with arguments for the third one, see Richard Alan Young, "The Knowledge of God in Romans 1:18-23: Exegetical and Theological Reflections," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000):695-707.

<sup>73</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 69.

<sup>74</sup>Moo, p. 110. For a relevant exposition of verses 21-22, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, pp. 79-123.

<sup>75</sup>Calvin, 1:5:4.

Certainly there have been a few individuals who have responded properly to general revelation, when enabled by God's Spirit to do so. Missionaries to primitive people occasionally come back with stories about how some tribe had been praying for God to give them more light, and God sent them a missionary. But Paul's point was that rejection, rather than acceptance, is typical of humanity unaided by God Himself. *By himself*, fallen man does not respond to general revelation.

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 humankind. It is what man as a whole has chosen, but it is also 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 restraint that allows sinners to reap the just fruits of their rebellion."<sup>76</sup>

It is active in another sense, however. God "gave man (them) over" (v. 24; cf. vv. 26, 28) by turning him (mankind) over to the punishment his crime earned, as a judge does a prisoner (cf. Hos. 4:17). 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. "Natural" here means in keeping with how God has designed people, and "unnatural" refers to behavior that is contrary to how God has made us.

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 ("Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.") 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 the 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; 2:24).

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<sup>76</sup>Mounce, p. 80.

"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."<sup>77</sup>

AIDS, for example, is probably a general consequence of man's rebellion against God (like other diseases), 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).

"Sin comes from the mind, which perverts the judgment. The effect of retribution is to abandon the mind to that depravity."<sup>78</sup>

"Contemporary homosexuals insist that these verses mean that it is perverse for a heterosexual male or female to engage in homosexual relations but it is not perverse for a homosexual male or female to do so since homosexuality is such a person's natural preference. This is strained exegesis unsupported by the Bible. The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:4-6) within marriage."<sup>79</sup>

"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."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Harrison, p. 25.

<sup>78</sup>Henri Maurier, *The Other Covenant*, p. 185.

<sup>79</sup>Witmer, pp. 443-44. See P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:560 (October-December 1983):350-58.

<sup>80</sup>David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:599 (July-September 1993):340. See also Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

Pederasty is a form of sodomy between males, especially as practiced by a man with a boy.

### **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 wordplay 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."<sup>81</sup>

"Unrighteousness" (v. 29; wickedness, NIV) is whatever 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.<sup>82</sup> Most of the rest of these characteristics are self-evident.<sup>83</sup>

"Insolent [v. 30]. Greek *hybristes*, one who behaves with humiliating and unconscionable arrogance to those who are not powerful enough to retaliate."<sup>84</sup>

The final step down in man's degradation is his promotion of wickedness (v. 32). It is bad to practice these things, but it is even 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."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Moo, p. 118.

<sup>82</sup>Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 93-97.

<sup>83</sup>See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

<sup>84</sup>Bruce, p. 81.

<sup>85</sup>Moo, p. 122.

This is the longest list of this type in the New Testament. Its purpose is to show the scope of social evils that result when God hands people "over to a depraved mind" after they refuse to acknowledge Him. See Matthew 15:19; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; and 1 Peter 4:3 for other "vice lists."

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 humankind as a whole, not that every individual has followed this general pattern of departure from God. 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).<sup>86</sup>

### **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 natural (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 even more 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 2:1-16, and more specifically about Jewish objectors, in verses 17-29.

"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."<sup>87</sup>

"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

<sup>86</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:518-19. For 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.

<sup>87</sup>Stiffler, p. 36.

of argument using *me genoito* ('May it never be!'), and the direct address of one's conversation partner or opponent."<sup>88</sup>

### **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. For example, someone might assume that since his immoral thoughts are not observable, he is free of guilt. But God looks at the heart. Consequently those who have practiced the same sins as those listed previously, though perhaps not in the same way, should not think they will escape judgment (v. 3). Rather than acting like judges of the outwardly immoral, these people should view themselves as sinners subject to God's judgment. They should not misinterpret God's not judging them quickly to be an indication that they are blameless. They should realize that God is simply giving them time to repent (v. 4; cf. Jer. 18:6-11; 2 Pet. 3:9).

"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."<sup>89</sup>

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 of wrath" 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).

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<sup>88</sup>Moo, p. 125.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

"God's anger stored up in heaven is the most tragic stockpile a man could lay aside for himself."<sup>90</sup>

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."<sup>91</sup>

Paul probably meant that if a person obeys God perfectly ("who by perseverance in doing good"), he or she will receive "eternal life." Those who do not obey God perfectly receive wrath. Later he would clarify that no one can obey God perfectly, so all are under His wrath (3:23-24).<sup>92</sup>

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 18:29-30; John 10:10; 12:25-26; 17:3; Gal. 6:8). According to this view 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.<sup>93</sup>

Other interpreters believe Paul meant that a person's perseverance *demonstrates* that his heart is regenerate.<sup>94</sup> 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).<sup>95</sup> The point of verses 9 and 10 is that the true basis of judgment is not whether one is a "Jew" or a "Greek," or whether he was *outwardly* moral or immoral. It is rather what he actually did, that determines whether he is *truly* moral or immoral. God will deal with "the Jew first" because his privilege was greater. He received special revelation in addition to natural revelation.

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<sup>90</sup>Mickelsen, p. 1188.

<sup>91</sup>A. M. Hunter, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 36. Cf. Matt. 25:31-46.

<sup>92</sup>Moo, pp. 139-42. Cf. Bruce, p. 85.

<sup>93</sup>See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 28, 135-45.

<sup>94</sup>E.g., Witmer, p. 445; and Cranfield, 1:147.

<sup>95</sup>See López, "A Study . . ."

"It is not possible to draw a clear distinction between *psuche* (soul) and *pneuma* (spirit). *Psuche* is from *psucho*, to breathe or blow, *pneuma* from *pneo*, to blow. Both are used for the personality and for the immortal part of man. Paul is usually dichotomous in his language, but sometimes trichotomous in a popular sense. We cannot hold Paul's terms to our moderns psychological distinctions."<sup>96</sup>

The third principle of God's judgment is that He will treat everyone evenhandedly (v. 11). There is equal justice for all ("no partiality") in God's court.

Verses 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.

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).<sup>97</sup>

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 (God's justice) he is not culpable (blameworthy). 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).<sup>98</sup>

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 self-interest ("law to themselves"). 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. One writer sought to explain what Paul did

<sup>96</sup>Robertson, 4:392-93.

<sup>97</sup>See 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.

<sup>98</sup>See Calvin, 3:14:13.



not, namely, how human beings can and do know God's moral law apart from special revelation.<sup>99</sup>

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 pre-programmed data in it, but whatever a person experiences programs his or her 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 helpful as we seek to live a morally consistent life.<sup>100</sup> The New Testament speaks of a good conscience (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21), a clear conscience (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 13:18), a guilty conscience (Heb. 10:22), a corrupt conscience (Titus 1:15), a weak conscience (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12), and a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2).

". . . when men have an awareness of divine judgment adjoined to them as a witness which does not let them hide their sins but arraigns them as guilty before the judgment seat—this awareness is called 'conscience.'"<sup>101</sup>

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 therefore 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 just appearance (v. 2). He will judge people because

<sup>99</sup>See Mark D. Mathewson, "Moral Intuitionism and the Law Inscribed on Our Hearts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:4 (December 1999):629-43.

<sup>100</sup>See C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*; and Roy B. Zuck, "The Doctrine of Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):329-40.

<sup>101</sup>Calvin, 4:10:3.

of their deeds, what they actually do both covertly and overtly (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).

" . . . 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 . . ." <sup>102</sup>

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

Even though the Jews had the advantages of the Mosaic Law and circumcision, their arrogance 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." <sup>103</sup>

"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." <sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Moo, p. 155.

<sup>103</sup>Mounce, pp. 97-98.

<sup>104</sup>Moo, p. 159.

2:17-20 Paul had been speaking of Jews, included in the larger category of "good people," in verses 1-16, but now he identified them by the name "Jew." The Jews were very self-righteous. Paul explained the basis of their "boast" in these verses.

The name "Jew" contrasts with "Greek" and calls attention to nationality.<sup>105</sup> 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 precise understanding of what is more and less important to God (cf. Phil. 1:10). They looked down on non-Jews as those who needed their guidance, even though, as Paul pointed out earlier, the Gentiles have some light and law themselves.

"The Jew believed that everyone was destined for judgment except himself. It would not be any special goodness which kept him immune from the wrath of God, but simply the fact that he was a Jew."<sup>106</sup>

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* which the Jews somewhat pretentiously gloried in playing: God had called them to enlighten the Gentiles with these gifts and capabilities (vv. 19-20).<sup>107</sup>

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).<sup>108</sup> By doing so, they betrayed their own idolatry, which was love of money. Furthermore, rather than staying away from what they professed to abhor, they went after (worshipped) pagan idols. The Jews' Gentile neighbors saw their inconsistency and despised ("blasphemed") 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 every single Jew practiced these sins, but these sins represented the contradiction, between claim and conduct, that marked Judaism.

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<sup>105</sup>Sanday and Headlam, p. 64.

<sup>106</sup>Barclay, p. 35.

<sup>107</sup>Godet, p. 127.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

2:25-27

Next to the Mosaic Law, the Jews boasted almost equally in their "circumcision." Most of the Jews in Paul's day believed that God would not permit any observant Jew to enter perdition.

"R. [Rabbi] Levi said; In the Hereafter Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna, and permit no circumcised Israelite to descend therein. What then will he do to those who have sinned very much? He will remove the foreskin from babes who died before circumcision and set it upon them [the sinners], and then let them descend into Gehenna . . ." <sup>109</sup>

Another rabbinic view was that God will send an angel who stretches (as if to cut) the foreskin of great sinners, and then they descend into Gehenna.<sup>110</sup> The Jews felt circumcision guaranteed their acceptance by God, provided they did not sin "very much" (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."<sup>111</sup>

"In the Greek this second part of verse 25 is interesting: 'If you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become a foreskin.'<sup>112</sup>

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 misleading. 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.

"Israel's neighbours for the most part practiced circumcision (the Philistines were a notorious exception); but the circumcision of Israel's neighbours was not a sign

<sup>109</sup>Midrash Rabbah, *Genesis*, 1:409-10. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah*, trans. Jacob Neusner, 2:182.

<sup>110</sup>Midrash Rabbah, *Exodus*, pp. 234-35.

<sup>111</sup>Moo, p. 169.

<sup>112</sup>Witmer, p. 447.

of God's covenant, as Israelite circumcision was intended to be."<sup>113</sup>

The reference to the "letter" (v. 27) probably means that the Jews had the Law written down. In this verse and the next two, Paul was contrasting two types of Jews, not Jews and Christians.

2:28-29

We now discover a second reason Paul chose to address his fellow Israelites as *Jews* in this section (vv. 17-29). Not only was "Jew" a title that non-Jews used to describe Israelites, but the word "Jew" comes from the name "Judah," which means "praise." Paul was saying the person who truly praises God, is not one who merely wears the label of circumcision, but one who really obeys God. Such a person has a *circumcised* "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."<sup>114</sup>

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. Actually a God-fearing Gentile was more pleasing to God than a disobedient Jew, because God delights in obedience.

### **3. Answers to objections 3:1-8**

In chapter 2, Paul showed that God's judgment of all people is determined by character rather than ceremony. He put the Jew on the same level as the Gentile regarding their standing before God. Still, God Himself also made a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In 3:1-8, Paul dealt with that distinction. He did this so there would be no question in the minds of his Jewish audience that they were guilty before God, and

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<sup>113</sup>Bruce, p. 89.

<sup>114</sup>Arnold 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; and Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 195-98.

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."<sup>115</sup>

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 in order to clarify his view for his readers. This is, again, the diatribe style of rhetoric. "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, then "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).<sup>116</sup> "Entrusted" highlights Israel's responsibility to guard and to propagate what she had received as a treasure.

Some people today also enjoy spiritual advantages, and falsely conclude that, because of these, God will give them preferential treatment. I have heard it said: "My grandfather was a minister, so God will look with favor on me."

3:3-4 Paul's second question was this: God will not forsake ("nullify") His promises to bless the nation ("faithfulness") because 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.

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.

<sup>115</sup>Moo, p. 180.

<sup>116</sup>Cf. Sanday and Headlam pp. 70-71; and Harrison, p. 35.

Still God brought the whole nation into Canaan as He had promised, though the unbelieving generation died in the wilderness.

Paul agreed ("May it never be!"). 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 ("though every man *be found* a liar"), not just if some proved unfaithful. Paul cited David's testimony to God's faithfulness after David's own unfaithfulness as historic, biblical support.

Today some people improperly count on God's character to excuse them from the consequences of their sins. For example, some believe that since God is love, He will be gracious with them and not punish them.

3:5-6 The third question connects with David's situation (v. 4): Since the Jews' failings ("our unrighteousness") set off God's "righteousness" more sharply by contrast, might not God deal more graciously with the Jews in His judgment of them ("God . . . is not unrighteous, is He")? 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."<sup>117</sup>

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 ("how would He judge the world").

Unfortunately, some people still think that God owes them mercy because their sinful way of life has provided God with an opportunity to demonstrate His own characteristics—such as His patience, His love, or His kindness.

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

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<sup>117</sup>David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 396.

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?

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 lack of circumcision (2:26-29). If anyone thinks that God should overlook his sinning because in some imagined sense it glorifies God, that person deserves condemnation (v. 8). Paul implied that this objection is so absurd that it is not worth considering.

A notable historical instance is the case of the Russian monk, Gregory Rasputin, the evil genius of the Romanov family in its last years of power. Rasputin taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He held that, as those who sin most require most forgiveness, a sinner who continues to sin with abandon enjoys, each time he repents, more of God's forgiving grace than any ordinary sinner. This point of view has been more common than is often realized, even when it is not expressed and practiced so blatantly as it was by Rasputin.

To summarize, 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 (vv. 5-6).
4. God will overlook the Jews' sins since they contribute to the glory of God (vv. 7-8).

Self-righteous people still raise these objections. Some people assume that because God has blessed them, He will not condemn them (objection one). Some believe the character of God prohibits Him from condemning them (objection two). Some think that even though they have sinned, God will be merciful and not condemn them (objection three). Some feel that since everything people do glorifies God in one way or another, God would be unjust to condemn them (objection four).

"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!"<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Newell, p. 78.



### **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."<sup>119</sup>

3:10-18 Paul was writing to a primarily Gentile congregation, so he *concluded* (rather than began) his argument with an appeal to Scripture. Contrast the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who took the opposite approach when he addressed a primarily Jewish readership. 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, a statement of the universality of sin opens and closes the passage. Sin has affected human intellect, emotions, and volition: all aspects of human personality. 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."<sup>120</sup>

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). No one seeks after God for His own sake. 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.

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<sup>119</sup>Moo, p. 201.

<sup>120</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 218-19.

"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."<sup>121</sup>

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!"<sup>122</sup>

". . . this collection of OT quotations illustrates the various forms of sin, the undesirable characteristics of sinners, the effect of their action, and their attitude toward God. This is the same picture that Paul himself has been painting."<sup>123</sup>

3:19-20 Paul added that, "whatever the Law says," it addresses to those involved in it, namely, all the Jews. He wrote this to "take the ground out from under" any 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."<sup>124</sup>

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

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<sup>121</sup>Mounce, p. 110.

<sup>122</sup>Newell, pp. 85-86.

<sup>123</sup>Mickelsen, p. 1191.

<sup>124</sup>Moo, p. 206.

(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 from God) by performing the works that God's Law requires.<sup>125</sup> Verse 20 probably serves to confirm human accountability rather than giving a reason for it.<sup>126</sup>

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 (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).

"The whole third chapter of Romans is nothing but a description of original sin [vs. 1-20]."<sup>127</sup>

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

The first major section of Romans, the *need* for God's righteousness (1:18—3:20), proves that people have no hope of obtaining righteousness on their own. In the second major section, the *imputation* of God's righteousness (3:21—5:21), we learn *how* it comes to us: as a gracious gift from God. We receive God's righteousness—that results in right standing with God—by faith.

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 (vv. 21-22) introduces his explanation of the salvation that God provides for guilty sinners that follows (vv. 23-26).

"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."<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup>See Kenneth W. Allen, "Justification by Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:538 (April-June 1978):109-16.

<sup>126</sup>Moo, p. 206.

<sup>127</sup>Calvin, 2:1:9. See also *ibid.*, 2:3:2.

<sup>128</sup>Stifler, p. 58.

### A. THE DESCRIPTION OF JUSTIFICATION 3:21-26

Paul began by explaining the concept of justification.<sup>129</sup>

"We now come to the unfolding of that word which Paul in Chapter One declares to be the very heart of the gospel . . ." <sup>130</sup>

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 *the* Law" (cf. v. 20). The definite article before "Law" is absent in the Greek text, though it probably refers to the Mosaic Law. Moreover, the righteousness of God "has been manifested" (perfect tense in Greek, "stands manifested"), namely, through the coming of (and "faith in") "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 (cf. Matt. 5:17). There Paul discussed Abraham and David, two representatives of these two sections of Scripture.

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

Here Paul introduced the *object* of faith (*Christ Himself*) 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*."<sup>131</sup>

Several 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

<sup>129</sup>See 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.

<sup>130</sup>Newell, p. 92.

<sup>131</sup>Godet, p. 147. Cf. Newell, p. 108.

something bestowed upon us, rather than a Divine reckoning about us."<sup>132</sup>

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 (through) faith."

3:23 All must come to God by faith in Jesus Christ, because "all have sinned and fall(en) short of (i.e., lack) God's glory" (cf. Mark 10:21). "The glory of God" refers to the outward manifestation of what God is. It includes especially the majesty of His powerful Person, and the sublimity of His supremely elevated position.<sup>133</sup> "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."<sup>134</sup>

It is all who believe (v. 22), not all who have sinned (v. 23), who receive justification (v. 24).<sup>135</sup> "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. But 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."<sup>136</sup>

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 has to do with sanctification.

"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

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>133</sup>Mickelsen, p. 1192; Harrison, p. 41.

<sup>134</sup>Newell, p. 114.

<sup>135</sup>See Blue, pp. 338-50.

<sup>136</sup>Newell, p. 114. See also Moo, p. 227.

that declaration will never be repealed. God looks on us and deals with us as though we had never sinned at all!"<sup>137</sup>

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 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.'"<sup>138</sup>

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."<sup>139</sup>

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

The "redemption which 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

<sup>137</sup>Wiersbe, 1:522.

<sup>138</sup>Newell, pp. 100, 104.

<sup>139</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace*, p. 2.

death of Christ from the retributive wrath of a holy God and the merited penalty of sin . . ."140

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 the bold, believing use *for ourselves* of the Scripture we learn, that God desires; and not merely the knowledge of Scripture."<sup>141</sup>

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 being presented in the gospel message rather than to His crucifixion.

There are two possible meanings of "propitiation" (NASB) or "sacrifice of atonement" (NIV). The Greek word (*hilasterion*) is an adjective that can substitute for a noun. It means having placating or expiating force.<sup>142</sup> 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 (cf. Luke 18:13; Heb. 2:17). 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" here, as representing His life poured out as a sacrifice of atonement, instead of the person of Christ, to draw attention to what made His sacrifice *atonement* (cf. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20). This then is a metonymy, in which the

<sup>140</sup>A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "apolutrosis," p. 65.

<sup>141</sup>Newell, p. 116.

<sup>142</sup>A *Greek-English . . .*, s.v. "hilasterios," p. 301.

name of one thing ("blood") appears in the place of another ("Jesus Christ" and "Jesus") associated with it.

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) that 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.

"Passed over" (NASB) or "left . . . unpunished" (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 (removed) 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.<sup>143</sup>

"Paul has thus pressed into service the language of the law-court ('justified'), the slave-market ('redemption') and the altar ('expiation', 'atoning sacrifice') in the attempt to do justice to the fullness of God's gracious act in Christ. Pardon, liberation, atonement—all are made available to men and women by his free initiative and may be appropriated by faith."<sup>144</sup>

3:26 This verse explains the significance of Jesus Christ's death since the Cross. It demonstrates "God's (His) 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."<sup>145</sup> To summarize, God can declare sinners righteous because

<sup>143</sup>See also Jarvis Williams, "Violent Atonement in Romans: The Foundation of Paul's Soteriology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:3 (September 2010):579-99.

<sup>144</sup>Bruce, pp. 101-2.

<sup>145</sup>Newell, p. 92.



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 righteous* those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Substitute.

"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."<sup>146</sup>

". . . we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."<sup>147</sup>

". . . 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."<sup>148</sup>

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).<sup>149</sup>

### **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 kind of law ("the law of faith") 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."<sup>150</sup>

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 ("the works of the Law"). God's gift of salvation, however, rests on a different law (principle) that God has also ordained and revealed.

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<sup>146</sup>Wiersbe, 1:522.

<sup>147</sup>Calvin, 3:11:2.

<sup>148</sup>Stifler, p. 67.

<sup>149</sup>Wiersbe, 1:523-24.

<sup>150</sup>Mounce, p. 38.

This "law" states 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."<sup>151</sup>

Some people have difficulty understanding that faith is not a work. While faith does involve doing something—trusting—the Bible never regards trusting God as a meritorious work. It regards faith, rather, as the act of believing a statement and relying on the truthfulness of the One who made it. When God says, "Whosoever believes on Him [His Son] has eternal life" (John 3:16), faith involves accepting that promise as true. Someone has compared saving faith to reaching out to accept a gift that another person offers, like a Christmas present. One must extend his or her arm to receive the gift, but that act does not constitute doing something that earns the gift.

- 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 other for Gentiles by faith. This is only logical, he reasoned, since there is only one God who is the God of all humankind ("of Gentiles also"). Paul probably used two separate prepositions in verse 30 ("by," *ek*, and "through," *dia*) simply for literary variety.<sup>152</sup> His point was that there is only one method of obtaining God's righteousness.<sup>153</sup>
- 3:31 Paul was not saying that "the Law" is valueless ("nullified"). The 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. Even though he believed in salvation by faith, Paul saw the Law as having an important function ("we

<sup>151</sup>Newell, p. 109.

<sup>152</sup>Moo, p. 252.

<sup>153</sup>Harrison, p. 46.

establish the Law").<sup>154</sup> Probably he meant that its function is to convict people of their inability to gain acceptance with God by their own works (vv. 19-20). Another view is that Paul meant the Old Testament (law) testifies to justification by faith.<sup>155</sup> A third view is that faith provides the complete fulfillment of God's demands in His Law.<sup>156</sup> 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). Justification by faith is also logical in view of the sovereignty of God (vv. 29-30), and it does not vitiate ("nullify") the Mosaic Law (v. 31).

"These presuppositions [of Martin Luther's] affected the translation [of his New Testament into German] but slightly. There is the famous example where Luther rendered 'justification by faith' as 'justification by faith alone.' When taken to task for this liberty, he replied that he was not translating words but ideas, and that the extra word was necessary in German in order to bring out the force of the original. Through all the revisions of his [German New Testament during] his lifetime he would never relinquish that word 'alone.'"<sup>157</sup>

#### **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. The apostle 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 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,

<sup>154</sup>See Femi Adeyemi, "Paul's 'Positive' Statements about the Mosaic Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:653 (January-March 2007):49-58.

<sup>155</sup>Godet, pp. 166-67; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 2:346; Cranfield, 1:224; et al.

<sup>156</sup>Moo, pp. 254-55; et al.

<sup>157</sup>Bainton, p. 261.

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."<sup>158</sup>

### **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 He started with a rhetorical question that he used often in Romans (cf. 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30): "What then shall we say?" 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.<sup>159</sup> They also taught that Abraham had a surplus of merit that was available to his descendants, the Jews.<sup>160</sup> 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 he [Abram] had believed . . ." Abraham had obviously believed God previously (cf. Gen. 12:1-4, 7; 14:22-24; Heb. 11:8). However, now Abraham was promised that he would receive an heir from his own body, plus innumerable descendants (Gen. 15:4). He believed this promise as well. 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."<sup>161</sup>

*Trust in God's promise* is what constitutes faith, and what 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

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<sup>158</sup>Moo, p. 255.

<sup>159</sup>Harrison, p. 47. Cf. 1 Macc. 2:51.

<sup>160</sup>Robertson, 4:350; Witmer, p. 453. Cf. Luke 3:8.

<sup>161</sup>Newell, p. 139.

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).

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.

"Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge. And this is, indeed, knowledge not only of God but of the divine will."<sup>162</sup>

4:4-5 Verses 4-5 contrast "faith" and "works." "Work" yields wages that the person working deserves or earns. "Faith" receives a gift (v. 4; lit. grace, Gr. *charin*) that the person believing does not deserve or earn. 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)!

"Here in a nutshell is the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith."<sup>163</sup>

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."<sup>164</sup> 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.<sup>165</sup> 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."<sup>166</sup>

Clearly this is not the position of most Christians who believe that faith alone is what God requires instead of faith plus commitment.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Calvin, 3:2:2.

<sup>163</sup>Mickelsen, p. 1193.

<sup>164</sup>Earl Radmacher, "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33:1 (March 1990):40.

<sup>165</sup>John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 94.

<sup>166</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 259. Cf. pp. 94-98.

<sup>167</sup>For 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.

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 often goes hand in hand with Lordship Salvation.

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.<sup>168</sup> 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]."<sup>169</sup>

Another answer, that some who hold these views give, is that what the Bible affirms is that man cannot *merit* eternal life.<sup>170</sup> 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).<sup>171</sup>

## **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."<sup>172</sup>

<sup>168</sup>E.g., MacArthur, pp. 100-101.

<sup>169</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 152.

<sup>170</sup>MacArthur, pp. 69, 105-21.

<sup>171</sup>Three excellent books on salvation by faith alone, all of which respond to Lordship Salvation, are Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*; Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*; and Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*

<sup>172</sup>Moo, p. 266.

Psalm 32 is one of David's penitential psalms, which he wrote after he had sinned greatly. Paul not only proved that David believed in "imputed," rather than "earned" righteousness, 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!"<sup>173</sup>

". . . it is not the 'reckoning' of people's good works but God's act in *not* reckoning their sins against them that constitutes forgiveness."<sup>174</sup>

"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."<sup>175</sup>

Since God is omniscient, He knows everything that has ever happened. By saying that God "forgets" our sins, the writers of Scripture meant that He will never bring us into judgment for our sins or condemn us for them (cf. 8:1). The idea of forgetting sins is anthropomorphic: the writer ascribes an action of man (forgetting) to God, in order to help us understand that God behaves as though He forgets our sins.

### **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 still "uncircumcised." He was a virtual Gentile. It was fourteen years later that 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 just an example of faith, but a model.

"As the recipient and mediator of the promise, his experience becomes paradigmatic for his spiritual progeny."<sup>176</sup>

### **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 alone. Paul reminded his

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<sup>173</sup>Newell, p. 136.

<sup>174</sup>Moo, p. 266.

<sup>175</sup>Wiersbe, 1:525.

<sup>176</sup>Moo, p. 267.

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 Abraham's descendants (Gen. 22:17-18). These nations included the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and many others, including Gentile nations. Therefore the Israelites were not the only people God had promised to bless. They did not have a corner on God's blessings.

4:13 God gave His "promise" to bless the Gentiles through Abraham ("he would be heir of the world") 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.<sup>177</sup>

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 ("faith is made void"). 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 (where there is no) law," there can be "no violation," and therefore no wrath. Moo explained Paul's logic as follows.

"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."<sup>178</sup>

<sup>177</sup>See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):443-44.

<sup>178</sup>Moo, pp. 276, 277.



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.<sup>179</sup>

"Faith is helplessness reaching out in total dependence upon God."<sup>180</sup>

4:17 Paul described God as he did here in harmony with the promise he cited. God gave to Abraham the ability to "father" many nations when his reproductive powers were dead. God summoned ("calls into being") yet uncreated nations as He had summoned the yet uncreated cosmos, namely, created them with a word ("a father of many nations have I made you"), in this case a promise (cf. Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5).<sup>181</sup> 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.

### **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 ("hope against hope"). His faith was not a condition for the reception of the promise, but "he believed" with the intention of receiving it.<sup>182</sup>

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* (without becoming) 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."<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>See Robert A. Pyne, "The 'Seed,' the Spirit, and the Blessing of Abraham," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):216-17.

<sup>180</sup>Mounce, p. 127.

<sup>181</sup>Cranfield, 1:246.

<sup>182</sup>Godet, p. 181.

<sup>183</sup>Moo, pp. 284-85. Cf. James. 1:6-8.

The patriarch believed God in the face of discouraging facts that he contemplated courageously ("did not waver in unbelief"). He believed despite the knowledge that what God had promised could not happen naturally. Abraham "grew stronger (strong) in faith," as time passed. The record of his life in Genesis shows this (v. 20). He was "giving glory to God" by believing Him (i.e., in God's *faithfulness* to His promise: "that which God had promised, He was also able to perform").

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 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."<sup>184</sup>

### **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 (in) 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. The 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).

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

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<sup>184</sup>James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2:621.

view of the normal retrospective use of *dia*, its use in parallel statements here, and since it makes good sense here. Paul evidently meant that 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.<sup>185</sup> 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 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.'"<sup>186</sup>

"God's entire redemptive plan is summarized in this final verse of chap. 4."<sup>187</sup>

I like the story about old "Uncle Oscar" and his first airplane ride. Knowing that he had been somewhat apprehensive about it, his friends were eager to hear how it went. At the first opportunity they asked him if he enjoyed the flight. "Well," he said, "it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be. But I'll tell you this. I never did put all my weight down!" Unfortunately that is how some Christians go through their lives. Even though Jesus' death satisfied God (1 John 2:2), it does not quite satisfy them.

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.

"In chapter 4, Paul presented several irrefutable reasons why justification is by faith: (1) Since justification is a gift, it cannot be earned by works (vv. 1-8). (2) Since Abraham was justified before he was circumcised,

<sup>185</sup>See Moo, pp. 288-89; Cranfield, 1:252; and Robertson, 4:354.

<sup>186</sup>Newell, pp. 157-58. His review of what justification is and is not on pages 159-61 is also helpful.

<sup>187</sup>Mounce, p. 131.

circumcision has no relationship to justification (vv. 9-12). (3) Since Abraham was justified centuries before the Law, justification is not based on the Law (vv. 13-17). (4) Abraham was justified because of his faith in God, not because of his works (vv. 18-25)."<sup>188</sup>

#### **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 that it would be quite uncertain. Paul next gave evidence that this method is reliable, by explaining the results of justification by faith.

Moo argued that chapter 5 belongs with chapters 6—8 more than with 3:21—4:25.<sup>189</sup> 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.

"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."<sup>190</sup>

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*. 'Being in a justified *state*' of course is incorrect, confusing, as it does, justification and sanctification."<sup>191</sup>

Some important Greek manuscripts read, "Let us have peace with God." If this is the correct reading, the meaning is, "Let us keep on having (and enjoying) peace with God."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup>Witmer, p. 455.

<sup>189</sup>Moo, pp. 290-95.

<sup>190</sup>Newell, p. 162.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>192</sup>Robertson, 4:354; Witmer, p. 456. See also Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "The Grammatical Internal Evidence for 'EXOMEN in Romans 5:1,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:3 (September 2011):559-72.

The second of the blessings "that came spilling out of the cornucopia of justification,"<sup>193</sup> after justification itself, is "peace" (cf. 1:7; 2:10). However, this is "peace *with* God" (i.e., reconciliation), not just a subjective feeling of tranquility 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).

"Peace and joy are twin blessings of the gospel: as an old preacher put it, 'peace is joy resting; joy is peace dancing.'"<sup>194</sup>

"Our peace with God is not as between two nations before at war; but as between a king and rebellious and guilty subjects."<sup>195</sup>

"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."<sup>196</sup>

5:2 The third benefit is *access* (Gr. *prosagoge*). The idea here is that Jesus Christ enables us to enjoy a 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. To "redeem" means to free or release from the slavery or bondage of sin by the payment of a ransom. Paul 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 from or based on 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 ("hope"). Paul had in view the "glory" that we will experience when we stand in the Lord's presence. To reconcile means to remove enmity, making peace between enemies.

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<sup>193</sup>Harrison, p. 55.

<sup>194</sup>Bruce, p. 114.

<sup>195</sup>Newell, p. 165.

<sup>196</sup>Moo, p. 300.

5:3-4 The fourth benefit of justification is joy in sufferings ("tribulations"). 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 assurance of standing acceptable in His presence, enables us to view present difficulties with joy. We can "rejoice ('exult') in tribulations" because God has revealed that He uses them to produce steadfast endurance ("perseverance") and "proven character" in those who relate to their sufferings properly (cf. Job 23:10; James 1:2-4; 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."<sup>197</sup>

"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."<sup>198</sup>

This quotation helps us see how character produces "hope." The hope of glorifying God with our proven 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 ("not disappoint"), because God loves us and enables us to withstand tribulations. He does this by ("through") His "Holy Spirit," whom He has given to indwell every justified sinner in the Church Age (cf. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:9). Paul developed the Holy Spirit's ministry to the believer later (ch. 8). The fifth 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."<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup>Wiersbe, 1:527.

<sup>198</sup>Harrison, p. 57.

<sup>199</sup>Moo, p. 304.

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" morally. The idea expressed by the Greek word (*asthenon*) is that we were "incapable of working out any righteousness for ourselves."<sup>200</sup> 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 as Paul used it (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.<sup>201</sup>

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*) us" 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 five benefits of justification. These blessings, in addition to justification itself, 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 is a benefit that justified sinners will experience in the future, namely, deliverance (rescue) "from" the outpouring of God's "wrath" on the unrighteous (cf. 1:18). Jesus Christ's "blood" is both 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, delivering us from coming wrath.

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<sup>200</sup>Sanday and Headlam, p. 127.

<sup>201</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 286-87.

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 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; Col. 1:21-22). The Scriptures always speak of man being "reconciled" *to God*. They never speak of God as reconciled to man. God *reconciles people* to Himself, He *redeems* them from *sin*, and He *propitiates Himself*, all through the death of His Son. 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.<sup>202</sup> 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 (progressive 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. The seventh benefit of justification by faith is our present relationship with God, made possible by Christ's reconciling work on the cross. We were saved by His death in the past, we will be saved by His life in the future, and we are presently enjoying a current saving relationship with God because of His work of reconciliation.

In this section Paul identified the following benefits of justification by faith.

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<sup>202</sup>See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:91-93.



1. Past justification (v. 1)
2. Peace with God (v. 1)
3. Access into God's grace (having been under God's wrath, v. 2)
4. Joy in tribulation (vv. 3-5a)
5. The indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 5b)
6. Deliverance from future condemnation (vv. 9-10)
7. Present reconciliation with God (v. 11)

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 (many various) 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!"<sup>203</sup>

#### **E. THE RESTORATIVE EFFECTS OF JUSTIFICATION 5:12-21**

Justification by faith not only carries with it many benefits (vv. 1-11), but it also overcomes the effects of the Fall. Paul's final argument in support of justification by faith involves 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 bring the opposite award to those who are in Him."<sup>204</sup>

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. Some interpreters believe Paul viewed Adam as the natural head of the human race, rather than as the federal head.<sup>205</sup> 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 primarily at what individual sinners have done, which had been his interest previously. Rather, he looked at what Adam did in the Fall, and what Jesus Christ did at the Cross—and the consequences of their actions for humanity. Adam's act resulted in his descendants sinning and dying. We inherit Adam's nature that was sinful, and this accounts for the fact that we all sin and die. We are sinners, not only because we commit acts of sin, but also because Adam's sin corrupted

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<sup>203</sup>Wiersbe, 1:528.

<sup>204</sup>Stifler, p. 95.

<sup>205</sup>E.g., Witmer, p. 458.

the human race, and made sin and punishment inevitable for his descendants as well as for himself. However, Christ's act of dying made all who trust in Him righteous apart from their own works.

"When one man fails in the accomplishment of God's purpose (as, in measure, all did), God raises up another to take his place—Joshua to replace Moses, David to replace Saul, Elisha to replace Elijah [Jesus to replace Adam]."<sup>206</sup>

"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.'"<sup>207</sup>

5:12           The first verse of this section (vv. 12-21) picks up the idea of future salvation from verses 9-10.

Paul did not call Adam and Christ by name here when he first spoke of them, but referred to each as "one man." The key word "one" occurs 14 times in verses 12-21. He thereby stressed the unity of each federal head with those under his authority who are also "men" (i.e., human beings).

If we did not continue reading, we might interpret this verse as meaning that Adam only set a *bad example* for mankind that everyone has followed. However, Adam's sin had a more direct and powerful effect than simply that of a bad example (v. 15). It resulted in his descendants inheriting a sinful human nature, which accounts in large part for our sinfulness.

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; 1 Cor. 11:3). Furthermore, Eve was deceived (2 Cor. 11:3), but Adam sinned deliberately (1 Tim. 2:14).

Paul compared the manner in which death entered the world, through sin, with the manner in which it spread to everyone, also through sin. Death is

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<sup>206</sup>Bruce, p. 119.

<sup>207</sup>Moo, pp. 315, 316.

universal because sin is universal. Paul's concern here was more with original death ("death spread to all men") 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."<sup>208</sup>

Witmer compared Adam's sin to a vapor that entered a house (humanity) through the front door and then penetrated the whole house.<sup>209</sup>

"Perhaps what makes this sermon ["Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," by Jonathan Edwards] most offensive to the ears of contemporary interpreters is not the language of impending destruction nor even that God is angry. What is probably most distasteful in Edwards's theology is the doctrine of original sin, that he would believe that human beings are born guilty of sin and deserving of divine wrath. Perhaps implicitly, the view of the universal goodness of humanity that permeates the worldview of many people today has also penetrated evangelical theology as well. That all humans, including children, are guilty of sin and therefore deserving of the wrath of God seems harsh and unfair to modern ears."<sup>210</sup>

Augustine and Calvin also believed that the Bible teaches original sin:

"Hence, as Augustine says, whether a man is a guilty unbeliever or an innocent believer, he begets not innocent but guilty children, for he begets them from a corrupted nature."<sup>211</sup>

"Original sin, therefore seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' [Gal. 5:19]."<sup>212</sup>

5:13-14 Paul did not carry through the comparison begun in verse 12 here. If he had, verse 13 would have read "so righteousness entered the world by one man and life through righteousness." Evidently Paul broke off his

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<sup>208</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>209</sup>Witmer, p. 458.

<sup>210</sup>Glenn R. Kreider, "Sinners in the Hands of a Gracious God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:651 (July-September 2006):274.

<sup>211</sup>Calvin, 2:1:7. His reference is from Augustine's *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin*, 2:40:45. See *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first edition, 5:253.

<sup>212</sup>Calvin, 2:1:8.

statement because he wanted to explain the relationship between sin and the Law, specifically: why there was death before the Law. Verses 13-14 explain verse 12. He returned to the thought begun in verse 12 in verse 18.

People died before God gave the Mosaic Law. If there is no law, there can be no transgression of law (cf. 3:20). Since death is the penalty for transgression of law, why did those people die? The answer is they died because they sinned "in" Adam. Adam transgressed God's law in the Garden of Eden, and ever since then, his descendants have transgressed God's moral law (their conscience), not just the Mosaic Law. This 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 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, advocates of "natural headship" point out, 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 all have to suffer the punishment for our sins ultimately, not only because Adam sinned, but because we all commit acts of sin. Some people rebel against God because of this universal punishment. However, God has promised not to punish us if we will trust in His Son (2 Cor. 5:19). He has provided a way to secure pardon from punishment.

It is the punishment for Adam's sin that we bear, not its guilt. We are guilty because we sin, but we die (the punishment for sin) because Adam sinned. Christ bore the punishment of our sins, not our guilt. He died in our place and for us. We are still guilty, but God will not condemn us for being guilty, because He has declared us righteous in Christ (i.e., has justified us). Guilt is both objective and subjective. We are objectively guilty, but we should feel no subjective guilt because we have been justified (declared righteous).

"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.'"<sup>213</sup>

Most evangelicals believe that infants and idiots die physically because of Adam's sin, but they do not die eternally (are unsaved) because they are incapable of exercising saving faith in Christ. Therefore, since God is just,

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<sup>213</sup>Newell, p. 183.

He will have mercy on them (cf. Gen. 18:25).<sup>214</sup> Some people base their belief in the salvation of such people on 2 Samuel 12:23, but that verse probably only means that David anticipated going into the grave (Sheol), where his infant son had gone, not going to heaven.

Adam was a "type" or "pattern" (Gr. *tupos*) of one who would follow him, namely, Jesus Christ. A type is a divinely intended illustration of something else, the antitype. A type may be a person, as here, or a thing (cf. Heb. 10:19-20), an event (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11), a ceremony (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), or an institution (cf. Heb 9:11-12). Adam is the only Old Testament character who is explicitly identified as a type of Christ in the New Testament. Adam's act had universal impact and prefigured Christ's act, which also had universal impact. The point of similarity between Adam and Christ is that what each did affected many others. Each communicated what belonged to him (his legacy) 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)."<sup>215</sup>

The rest of this chapter develops seven contrasts (one per verse) between Adam's act of sin and Christ's act of salvation. As Adam's act of sin resulted in inevitable death for all his descendants, so Christ's act of obedience resulted in inevitable life for all who believe in Him.

5:15            In verse 15, the *essences* of Adam's act and Christ's act are contrasted, namely: "the transgression, and "the free gift."

Paul probably used the phrase "the many" to contrast them (each group) with Adam or Christ respectively, 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 saving act by faith, namely, all believers.

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 (cf. vv. 9, 10, 17, 20). "Much more" here shows that Jesus Christ did not only cancel the effects of Adam's sin, but He provided more than Adam lost or even possessed before the Fall, namely: the righteousness of God!

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<sup>214</sup>See Robertson, 4:358-59.

<sup>215</sup>Wiersbe, 1:530.

- 5:16 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). Here the divine *verdicts*, following Adam's act and Christ's act, are in view: condemnation and justification.
- 5:17 The consequence of Adam's sin was "death" reigning over mankind. The consequence of Christ's obedience was mankind (believers "in life") reigning over death (v. 17). This implies the believer's ultimate resurrection and participation in Jesus Christ's reign, as well as his or her reigning in this life. Death and life are the contrasting *consequences* of Adam's act and Christ's act.
- 5:18 This verse and the next 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. Paul contrasted the *extents* of Adam's act and Christ's act: "condemnation" came upon "all men," and "justification" came upon "all men" (who believe in Christ).

There are really three reasons why all human beings, except Christ, are guilty before God: First, God imputed Adam's guilt to each of his descendants. This is called "original sin." This is a legal matter. Just as children who are born in any given country are automatically governed by conditions that the country's forefathers set in motion, so people who are born in Adam's race automatically fall under conditions that Adam set in motion. Second, every human being is born with a human nature that has been defiled by sin. This is called our "sin nature." This is an inheritance matter (cf. Ps. 51:5). Third, every person commits acts of sin. This is "personal sin." This is an individual matter (cf. Rom. 3:23).

"In general, it may be said that the New Testament teaching concerning original sin and its consequences finds no analogy in the Rabbinical writings of that period. As to the mode of salvation, their doctrine may be broadly summed up under the designation of work-righteousness."<sup>216</sup>

- 5:19 Here the contrast is between the *issues* involved in Adam's act and Christ's act. Adam disobeyed God, and Christ obeyed God. "Transgression" or "trespass" (cf. vv. 15, 16, 17) highlights the deliberate "disobedience" of Adam (v. 19; cf. Gen. 2:17). Many "will become (be made) righteous" (v. 19), both forensically (justified), as they believe, and finally (glorified). "The many" here, of course, means the justified. Obviously these verses do not mean that everyone will be justified. 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.

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<sup>216</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 177.

"There is no more direct statement in Scripture concerning justification than we find in verse 19 . . ." <sup>217</sup>

5:20 One of the purposes of the Mosaic Law was to illuminate 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' . . ." <sup>218</sup>

Paul's statement "the Law came in *that*" can be understood as both a purpose clause and a result clause. <sup>219</sup> 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): "super-abounded."

"The apostle waxes almost ecstatic as he revels in the superlative excellence of the divine overruling that makes sin serve a gracious purpose." <sup>220</sup>

The contrast in this verse deals with the *significances* of Adam's act and Christ's act. The Law showed the significance of Adam's sin more clearly, and God's provision of Christ showed the significance of God's grace more clearly.

5:21 Verse 21 is the grand conclusion of the argument in this section (5:12-21). It brings together the main concepts of sin and death, and righteousness and life. Paul effectively played down Adam and exalted Jesus Christ. Here Paul contrasted the *dominions* of Adam's act and Christ's act: sin reigning in death and grace reigning to eternal life.

"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." <sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup>Newell, p. 178.

<sup>218</sup>Moo, p. 348. Cf. 7:13; Gal. 3:19.

<sup>219</sup>Witmer, p. 460.

<sup>220</sup>Harrison, p. 65.

<sup>221</sup>Moo, p. 350.

<b>CONTRASTS IN ROMANS 5:12-21<sup>222</sup></b>		
<b>Two men</b>	<b>Adam (v. 14)</b>	<b>Christ (v. 14)</b>
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 super-abounds
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
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 humankind is guilty before God because all of Adam's descendants are sinners due to Adam's sin. Earlier Paul wrote that we are all guilty because we have all committed acts of sin (chs. 3—4). Ultimately, we sin and die because Adam sinned and died. Jesus Christ's death has righteously removed both causes for condemnation: guilt for our sins and punishment for Adam's sin. This section stresses 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).

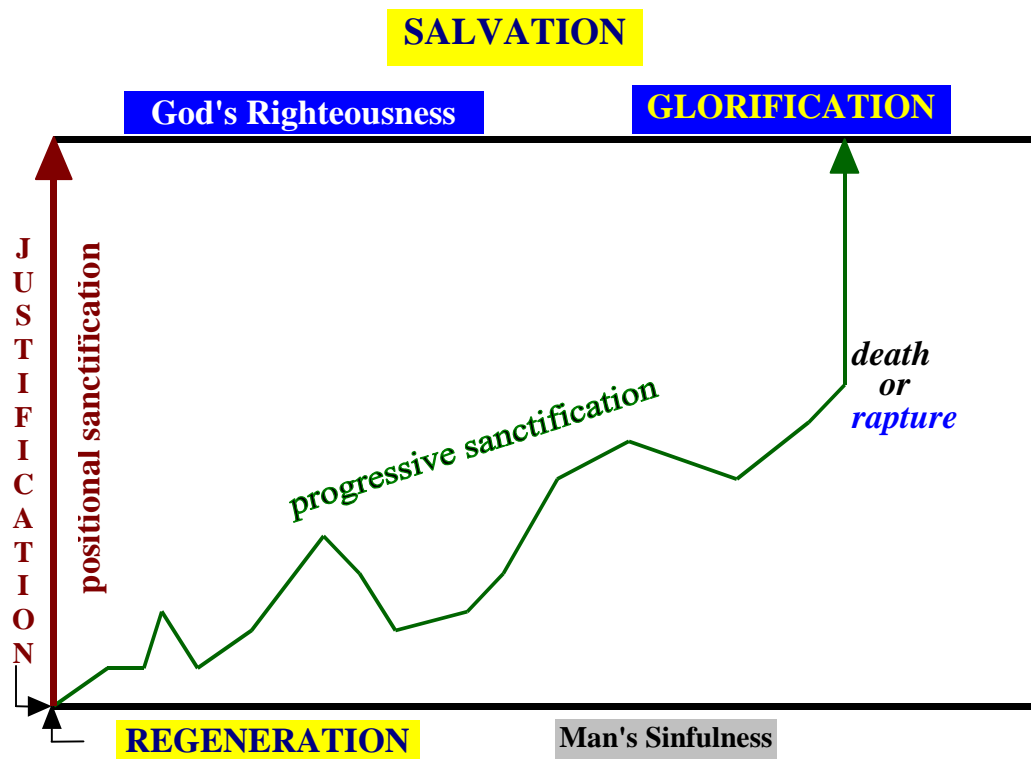
When a sinner experiences redemption—"converted" is the subjective term—he or she simultaneously experiences justification. Justification imputes God's righteousness to him or her. Justification is the same thing as "positional sanctification." This term means that God views the believer as completely holy in his or her standing before God.

<sup>222</sup>Adapted from Newell, p. 176. See also the chart in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 461.



Consequently, that person is no longer guilty because of his or her sins (cf. 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11).

When a sinner experiences redemption, he or she begins a process of progressive practical sanctification. This process of becoming progressively more righteous (holy) in his or her daily 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.<sup>223</sup> Our 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 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.

". . . the fundamental thought is that the believer is united to Christ. This new principle makes him dead to sin (ch. vi.); but it also provides a new power which enables him to be free from law (ch. vii.); and still more, it

<sup>223</sup>See Ryrie, *So Great . . .*, pp. 152-54.

includes a new possibility, for in the gift of the Holy Spirit there is a new position for holiness (ch. viii.)."<sup>224</sup>

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

"Subduing the power of sin is the topic of Rom. 6."<sup>225</sup>

#### **1. Freedom from sin 6:1-14**

Paul began his explanation of the believer's relationship to sin by explaining 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.

"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."<sup>226</sup>

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. It is in this respect that Paul described believers as identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection in the following verses. Paul previously introduced the concept of Christ as our representative in 5:12-21 (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14). 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, and it obviously develops further what Paul wrote in 5:12-21.

"In ch. 6 there are four key words which indicate the believer's personal responsibility in relation to God's sanctifying work" (1) to 'know' the facts of our union and identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (vv. 3, 6, 9); to 'reckon' or count these facts to be true concerning ourselves (v. 11); to 'yield,' or present ourselves once for all as alive from the dead for God's possession and use (vv. 13, 16, 19); and (4) to 'obey' in the realization that sanctification can proceed only as we are obedient to the will of God as revealed in His Word (vv. 16-17)."<sup>227</sup>

6:1 One writer counted 74 rhetorical questions in Roman.<sup>228</sup> This chapter begins with one of them. 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

<sup>224</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 164.

<sup>225</sup>Moo, p. 350.

<sup>226</sup>Robert A. Pyne, "Dependence and Duty: The Spiritual Life in Galatians 5 and Romans 6," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 149.

<sup>227</sup>*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1217.

<sup>228</sup>B. Kaye, *The Argument of Romans with Special Reference to Chapter 6*, p. 14.

and His greater glory. One expression of this view is Voltaire's famous statement, "God will forgive; that is his 'business.'"<sup>229</sup> W. H. Auden voiced similar sentiments:

"I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged."<sup>230</sup>

Paul probably posed the question to draw out the implications of God's grace ("Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?").

". . . justification by faith is not simply a legal matter between me and God; it is a living relationship."<sup>231</sup>

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 having a ruling power or realm. We died to sin through Christ 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."<sup>232</sup>

Note that Paul did not say 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 needs to do so, and should not.

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?"<sup>233</sup>

This expositor 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.). Romans 6:13 and 12:1-2 are three of the clearest verses in the Bible that submission to the Lordship of Christ is

<sup>229</sup>Cited by Moo, p. 356.

<sup>230</sup>W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being*, p. 116.

<sup>231</sup>Wiersbe, 1:531.

<sup>232</sup>Barclay, p. 86.

<sup>233</sup>MacArthur, p. 106.

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 (with respect to) 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."<sup>234</sup>

"Baptism . . . functions as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole."<sup>235</sup>

Water baptism for the early Christians was an initiation into Christian living. 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.<sup>236</sup>

". . . 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. . . .

"'Burial with Christ' is a description of the participation of the believer in Christ's own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism."<sup>237</sup>

"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*."<sup>238</sup>

". . . baptism is introduced not to explain *how* we were buried with Christ but to demonstrate *that* we were buried with Christ."<sup>239</sup>

"From this and other references to baptism in Paul's writings, it is plain that he did not regard baptism as an 'optional extra' in the Christian life."<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>234</sup>Wiersbe, 1:531.

<sup>235</sup>Moo, p. 355.

<sup>236</sup>See Calvin, 4:16:2.

<sup>237</sup>Moo, pp. 362, 363.

<sup>238</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 130.

<sup>239</sup>Moo, p. 364. See his excursus on Paul's "with Christ" concept on pages 391-95.

<sup>240</sup>Bruce, p. 128.

Neither did Paul regard it as essential for salvation (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:17). 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 (newness of) life" to believers. Walking in "newness" (a new kind) "of life" shows outwardly 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 this verse, Paul apparently meant our physical resurrection in view of what follows. He was speaking of the Christian's bodily resurrection 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 toward 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."<sup>241</sup>

"Satan's great device is to drive earnest souls back to beseeching God for what God says has already been done!"<sup>242</sup>

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; he no longer exists as he once was. 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.<sup>243</sup> 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).

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<sup>241</sup>Wiersbe, 1:530.

<sup>242</sup>Newell, p. 213.

<sup>243</sup>See John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5—8*, p. 45.

"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)."<sup>244</sup>

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.

I prefer not to use the term "new nature." It does not appear in Scripture. The New Testament does not present the Christian as a person with two natures warring within him or her. Rather 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).

"What we *were* 'in Adam' is no more; but, until heaven, the temptation to *live* in Adam always remains."<sup>245</sup>

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 of sin.

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

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<sup>244</sup>Newell, p. 212. See I. Howard Marshall, "Living in the 'Flesh'," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002):387-403, for an excellent word study of "flesh."

<sup>245</sup>Moo, p. 375.

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's power or dominion in daily living in this section (practical sanctification, not justification).

6:8 "If" could be translated "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). However, some writers have taken this as referring to our life lived out here and now.<sup>246</sup>

6:9 "Death" could not hold ("no longer is master over") 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.

"This stands in opposition to the doctrine and practice of the so-called perpetual sacrifice of Christ in the Roman Catholic Mass."<sup>247</sup>

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. The verb is a present imperative in the Greek text, indicating that we should definitely and constantly view ourselves this way. We must realize that we are free to enjoy our new relationship with God forever. One writer explained well how Christians should view themselves.<sup>248</sup>

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 only understand them, but believe them. He used the same Greek word (*logisthetai*) here as he did in his explanation of justification (2:26; 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24). God registers righteousness in the believer's account. Similarly, we should register it as true that our relationship to sin and death has changed. Only as we do so will we relate

<sup>246</sup>E.g., Mounce, p. 152; and Cranfield, 1:312-13.

<sup>247</sup>Witmer, p. 463. Cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10.

<sup>248</sup>See Don Matzat, *Christ-Esteem*.

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 count on sin not having 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."<sup>249</sup>

In some parts of the United States, "I reckon" means "I guess." For example, "I reckon it's going to rain this afternoon." That is not its meaning here. It means to count on something being true, to believe it.

"This is no game of 'let's pretend'; believers should consider themselves to be what God in fact has made them."<sup>250</sup>

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 as believers we know that we are no longer subject to sin's domination, and since we count that as true, we should "not let sin reign in" our bodies (selves) any longer. "Sin" is no longer our master, so we can and should stop carrying out its orders. Paul undoubtedly was giving a general prohibition, not implying that the Roman Christians in particular were letting sin reign over them (cf. 15:14-15). 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."<sup>251</sup>

6:13 In particular, we should not use our natural capacities to commit sin. Positively, we should "present" or "offer" ourselves to God, and our "members" (eyes [representing what we look at], ears [what we listen to], mouths [what we say], hands [what we do], feet [where we go], hearts [what we love], minds [what we think about], wills [the decisions we make], etc.) as His tools ("instruments") to fulfill His will (cf. 12:1).

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<sup>249</sup>Newell, p. 225.

<sup>250</sup>Bruce, p. 132.

<sup>251</sup>Moo, p. 383.



Believers have a choice. We can present (offer or dedicate) 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. The unbeliever can sometimes choose to do what is right, but he or she can never escape the dominating effect of sin in his or her life.

"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."<sup>252</sup>

I find that it is helpful for me to make this conscious presentation of myself to God daily.

<b>THE CHRISTIAN'S THREE-FOLD ENEMY</b>	
<i>Problem</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<b>The World</b> (1 John 2:15-17) Lust of the flesh Lust of the eyes Pride of life	<b>Flee</b> (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22)
<b>The flesh</b> (Rom. 7:18-24)	<b>Deny</b> (Rom. 6:12-13; 8:13)
<b>The devil</b> (1 Peter 5:8)	<b>Resist</b> (1 Peter 5:9)

"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.'"<sup>253</sup>

"Paul's first instruction ('know') centered in the *mind*, and this second instruction ('reckon') focuses on the *heart*. His third instruction touches the *will*."<sup>254</sup>

<sup>252</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>253</sup>Newell, p. 229.

<sup>254</sup>Wiersbe, 1:532.

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."<sup>255</sup>

"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."<sup>256</sup>

6:14

"In verses 1-11 the Apostle has shown what it means to be united to Christ; in verses 12 and 13 he has shown the consequences and made his appeal to the believer; and now in verse 14 he assures us of the Divine provision for the complete fulfillment of these exhortations."<sup>257</sup>

The apostle concluded this section of his argument with a word of encouragement. "Sin" will no longer master ("be master over") the believer. The basic reason for this is that believers are "not under" the Mosaic "Law"—as the authority under which they 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 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. Neither was there an absence of grace under the Mosaic Law.

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<sup>255</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, "Is the Holy Spirit Transforming You?" *Kindred Spirit* 18:1 (January-April 1994):7. This article is an excerpt from the same writer's book *Flying Closer to the Flame*.

<sup>256</sup>Wiersbe, 1:533.

<sup>257</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 171.

"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.'"<sup>258</sup>

## **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 Christians are free, they can become enslaved to sin by yielding to temptation (vv. 15-23; cf. John 8:34). Rather, as believers, 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)."<sup>259</sup>

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.

"Surely, the objector says, we may take a night off now and then and sin a little bit 'since we are under grace.'"<sup>260</sup>

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*."<sup>261</sup>

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 Jesus' teachings as to Law. They had willingly

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<sup>258</sup>Moo, pp. 390-91.

<sup>259</sup>Wiersbe, 1:533.

<sup>260</sup>Robertson, 4:364.

<sup>261</sup>Newell, p. 238.

embraced it as law for themselves. They had committed themselves to it from their 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 ("slaves of righteousness"). He said the Roman Christians 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 to a greater extent than he will if he does present himself to God (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 ("as slaves to impurity"). Now they needed to deliberately present (offer) themselves "as slaves to God (righteousness)" (cf. vv. 13, 16). This would result in their progressive sanctification.<sup>262</sup> 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.*"<sup>263</sup>

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 ("were free from") 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 ("benefit," fruit) from their slavery to sin. Shame was its immediate result, and "death" its final fruit ("outcome").

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<sup>262</sup>See Larry J. Waters, "Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):435-41.

<sup>263</sup>Newell, p. 242. Cf. John 8:31-32, 34, 36.

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 ("benefit") of progressive "sanctification" (holiness), and the fullness (abundant "outcome") of "eternal life" (cf. John 10:10; 17:3). Scripture speaks of eternal life as both the immediate and the ultimate product of progressive sanctification. *Quality* of life is involved as well as quantity.

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(s)" 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 only 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."<sup>264</sup>

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 (or abundance) of eternal life.

In chapter 6, Paul prescribed four 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. 12-14). Fourth, we must "obey" God (vv. 15-23). If we do not, we will find ourselves falling back under the domination of sin in our lives—and becoming its slaves once again. 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.<sup>265</sup>

Christians over the years have understood the role of dedication in practical sanctification in several different ways. First, some believe that when a Christian experiences a second work of grace in his or her life (a "second blessing" or a spiritual crisis), he or she rises to new heights of holiness from which he or she never falls. This is the sinless perfection view. Second, some believe that when a Christian truly dedicates himself or herself to

<sup>264</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "opsonion," by H. W. Heiland, 5 (1967):592.

<sup>265</sup>See Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:351-54.

God, he or she rises to a level of holiness from which he or she never falls. This is not sinless perfection, but a higher level of holiness than those who do not dedicate themselves to God experience. Third, some believe that dedication to God is a good idea but not very important, because Christians struggle with sin all their lives. This is a rather fatalistic view that does not give enough credit to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, some believe that unless a person dedicates himself or herself to God, or at least is willing to do so, he or she cannot be saved. This view confuses the requirement for justification (faith) with the requirement for discipleship (obedience), by mixing them together. Ideally, dedication should accompany saving faith, but it does not need to do so for a person to be saved. Fifth, some believe that dedicating oneself to God once is all that is necessary to live a consistently upright life. This view often interprets the aorist tense of the Greek verb, translated "present" in 6:13 and 12:1, as meaning "present once and for all." Sixth, some believe that, in view of repeated lapses in the Christian's dedication, repeated dedications are helpful to make progress in Christian growth. The aorist tense also means "to present in an act of decisive dedication, and allows for rededications. I favor the last view. Of course, there are other views, and various combinations of these six, but I believe these are some of the most common views within evangelicalism.

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

Having explained that we are now under grace (ch. 6), Paul explained that we are not under the Law (ch. 7; cf. 6:15). He followed a similar pattern as he unpacked his revelation in this chapter like 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).

Paul needed to explain the believer's relationship to the Law because of people's natural tendency to view keeping laws 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."<sup>266</sup>

### **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. But it is the acquaintance of these Roman believers with Old Testament law that is probably Paul's point.<sup>267</sup>

The Romans would not have argued with Paul 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. The "law" binds a wife "to her husband." 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 represents 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."<sup>268</sup>

7:4 "Therefore" introduces an application of the illustration to the readers. The believer was not "made to die to the Law" (i.e., been freed from its binding authority) because the Law died, but because we died with Christ. We have died to the Mosaic Law (Torah), not to the Old Testament; the Old Testament is still authoritative revelation for the Christian. But the relationship that once existed between the Old Testament believer and the Mosaic Law no longer exists for the Christian. 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 commands of the Mosaic Law.

Every believer not only died with Christ, but also arose with Him (6:14). Thus God has "joined" us "to Christ ('to another')"—in both His death and resurrection. 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. 5:22-23).

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<sup>266</sup>Wiersbe, 1:534.

<sup>267</sup>Cranfield, 1:333.

<sup>268</sup>Mounce, p. 160.

- 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 properly as "sinful nature." The description itself does not indicate whether the people in view are saved or unsaved, since both groups 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 ("bear fruit for") "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 (gears) 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.<sup>269</sup> "Newness" or "new" (Gr. *kainoteti*) suggests something fresh rather than something recent. Our service is more recent, but Paul stressed the superiority, 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. But "spirit" and "flesh" probably refer to the new and old covenants respectively.<sup>270</sup> 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"—as opposed to the whole. 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 Christians' lives (cf. 10:4). Christians have received a new

<sup>269</sup>See Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*.

<sup>270</sup>Moo, p. 421.



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. The one that Jesus did not carry over was the fourth commandment about Sabbath observance. Nevertheless the Law of Christ 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.<sup>271</sup> 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 10:10-15; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:12; 9:10; Gal. 3:24; 4:9-11; 5:1).

## **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 makes us aware of what is sinful (cf. 3:20). The Law is similar to an X-ray machine that reveals a tumor. The machine itself is not bad because it reveals something bad.

The apostle probably appealed to his own personal experience. The main alternative views are that he was speaking of Adam's experience, Israel's experience, or the experience of every man.<sup>272</sup> Paul broadened his own experience into a more general picture of the struggle that every person faces (vv. 7-13), and the struggle that every believer encounters when he or she tries to serve God by obeying the Law (vv. 14-25). Others hold that Paul was describing only the experience of an unbeliever. Discussion of these views will follow. Every believer, particularly, feels frustrated by the operation of his or her sinful human nature.

"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."<sup>273</sup>

"He gives a picture of all men under law in order to show why death to law is a part of the Gospel."<sup>274</sup>

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

<sup>271</sup>See Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):239-47.

<sup>272</sup>See Moo, pp. 425-31, and Cranfield, 1:342-47, for explanations of these other views.

<sup>273</sup>Newell, p. 261.

<sup>274</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 186.

Commandments. Reformed theologians like to distinguish the moral from the ceremonial parts of the Mosaic Law at this point. Many of them contend that God has only terminated the ceremonial part of the Law.<sup>275</sup> Here, 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, of course, 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)."<sup>276</sup>

The demands of the Law, in this case, "Thou shalt not covet," make us consciously aware of ("come to know") 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.

"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."<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>E.g., Calvin, 2:458-60.

<sup>276</sup>Wiersbe, 1:535.

<sup>277</sup>Newell, pp. 265-66. Cf. Barclay, p. 99.

"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 (unaffected by) 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 pre-conversion 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!"<sup>278</sup>

When the commandment entered Paul's consciousness, it aroused "sin," and he "died"—in the sense that he became aware of his spiritual deadness. This is true of everyone. Paul was not speaking of His union with Christ in death here, but of his moment of recognition of his unsaved condition.

7:10 The original intent of the Law (for the Old Testament believers) 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.*"<sup>279</sup>

7:11 Paul personified "sin" as an actor here. "Sin" plays the part of a tempter. It "deceived" Paul and "killed" (destroyed) him (cf. Gen. 3). Paul's sinful nature urged him—being typical of all people—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

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<sup>278</sup>Newell, p. 268.

<sup>279</sup>Moo, p. 439.

Spirit enlightens us and enables us; no human leader can do that."<sup>280</sup>

7:12 Here is a concluding 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).<sup>281</sup>

### **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). Many students of this passage, including myself, 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.<sup>282</sup> The present tenses in his testimony support this view. 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 the normal or necessary Christian experience. What is normal and necessary for a Christian is to obey God, since the Holy Spirit leads, motivates, and enables us; disobedience is, in this sense, abnormal Christian conduct.

7:13 Paul next explained the Law's relationship to death. The responsibility for "death" belongs to "sin," not the Law (cf. 6:23). Sin's use of something "good," the "Law," to bring something horrendous, "death"—shows the *utter sinfulness* of "sin" (cf. Gen. 3:1).

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*; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1). It came from God (cf. vv. 22, 25). Paul did not want his readers to understand what he was going to say about the Law as a criticism of the God who gave it.

In contrast to the good Law, Paul was fleshly ("of flesh") or unspiritual (Gr. *sarkinos*, made of flesh; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1). Man is essentially different from the Law because we have a sinful nature, whereas the Law itself is 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

<sup>280</sup>Wiersbe, 1:536.

<sup>281</sup>See Adeyemi, pp. 55-57.

<sup>282</sup>Cf. John F. Hart, "Paul as Weak in Faith in Romans 7:7-25," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:679 (July-September 2013):317-43.

thought himself fully rid, when he first believed, is a 'second lesson' which is often more bitter than the first—of guilt!"<sup>283</sup>

Paul's statement that he was even now as a Christian the slave of ("sold into bondage to") sin may seem to contradict what he wrote earlier, in chapter 6, about no longer being the slave of sin. The phrase "sold in bondage to sin" is proof to many interpreters that Paul was describing a non-Christian here. However, in chapter 6, Paul did not say that considering oneself dead to sin means that sin has lost its appeal for the Christian. It still has a strong appeal to any Christian, because their human nature is still sinful (6:15-23). He said that considering oneself 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 through Christ, 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). Even so, 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).

"We take it then that Paul is here describing the Christian as carnal and implying that even in him there remains, so long as he continues to live this mortal life, that which is radically opposed to God (cf. 8.7), though chapter 8 will make it abundantly clear that he does not regard the Christian as being carnal in the same unqualified way that the natural man is carnal."<sup>284</sup>

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. All Christians can identify with him in this.

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<sup>283</sup>Newell, p 272.

<sup>284</sup>Cranfield, 1:357. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14—3:3.

- 7:16 The apostle's attitude toward the Law was not the reason for his dilemma, since he admitted that "the Law is good."
- 7:17 Rather, his problem was traceable to the "sin" that dwelled within him, namely: his sinful nature. Paul was not trying to escape responsibility but he 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, which was still *very much alive*.
- It comes as a terrible discovery for a new believer, or an untaught believer, to realize that their problem with sin is complex. We are sinners, not only because we commit acts of sin (ch. 3), but because, as descendants of Adam, we sin because he sinned (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 punishment 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!*"<sup>285</sup>
- By "nothing good dwells in me," 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. "Total depravity" refers to the fact that sin has affected every aspect of a person. It does not mean that people are necessarily as bad as they could be.
- 7:19-20 These verses restate the idea of verses 15 and 17 respectively. Paul evidently repeated these ideas in order to heighten our appreciation of the frustration that he felt, as well as to emphasize the importance of this principle, and that Paul's experience stood for every Christian's.
- 7:21 The statement of this "principle" or "law" summarizes Paul's thought.<sup>286</sup>
- Six 'laws' are to be differentiated in Romans: (1) the law of Moses, which condemns (3:19); (2) law as a principle (3:21); (3) the law of faith, which excludes self-righteousness (3:27); (4) the law of sin in the members,

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<sup>285</sup>Newell, p. 270.

<sup>286</sup>See Saucy, "'Sinners' Who . . .," pp. 405-11.

which is victorious over the law of the mind (7:21, 23, 25); (5) the law of the mind, which consents to the law of Moses but cannot do it because of the law of sin in the members (7:16, 23); and (6) the law of the Spirit, having power to deliver the believer from the law of sin which is in his members, and his conscience from condemnation by the Mosaic law. Moreover the Spirit works in the yielded Christian the very righteousness which Moses' law requires (8:2, 4)."<sup>287</sup>

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 ("different law," v. 23).

"In the light of 8:7-8 it is difficult to view the speaker here [in v. 22] as other than a believer."<sup>288</sup>

This natural rebelliousness was something he could not rid himself of. Perhaps Paul used the term "law of the mind" because the mind has the capacity to perceive and make moral judgments.<sup>289</sup>

"It is because people do not recognize their all-badness that they do not find Christ all in all to them."<sup>290</sup>

Happily, Paul explained in chapter 8 that someone with infinite power can enable us to control and overcome 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 ("Wretched man that I am!"). 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?"<sup>291</sup>

7:25 The solution to this dilemma is not escape from temptation, but victory over it "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"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

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<sup>287</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1220.

<sup>288</sup>Bruce, p. 146.

<sup>289</sup>Witmer, p. 468.

<sup>290</sup>Newell, p. 278.

<sup>291</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, p. 317.

be a broken reed. Through sin it is no longer a comfort but an accusation. Man needs not a law but deliverance."<sup>292</sup>

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, in order to prepare his readers for the grand deliverance that he expounded in the next chapter.

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, and the text supports it. 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, at least by natural (general) revelation, if not through special revelation or the Mosaic Law, as well as 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?

<b>ARGUMENTS FOR THE UNSAVED VIEW</b>	
<b>PRO</b>	<b>CON</b>
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.
4. 8:1 marks a change from dealing with the unsaved to the saved condition.	8:1 marks a transition from the domination of the sinful human nature to deliverance through Jesus Christ.
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.	Paul's argument did not require these references since the conflict in view is between the law and the flesh (human nature).

<sup>292</sup>Barrett, p. 151.



<b>ARGUMENTS FOR THE SAVED VIEW</b>	
<b>PRO</b>	<b>CON</b>
1. Augustine and the Reformers held this view.	Older support by the church fathers favors the other 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.	Paul used the present tense in verses 14-25 for vividness of expression.
3. If Paul described his pre-Christian life here, he contradicted what he said of it in Philippians 3:6.	In Philippians 3 Paul described his standing before other people, but here he described his relationship to God.
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, as do many others.<sup>293</sup>

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.<sup>294</sup>

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 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

<sup>293</sup>E.g., Calvin, 2:2:27; MacArthur, pp. 123-38; Cranfield, 1:365-70; Witmer, p. 467; and Bruce, pp. 140-47. Moo, pp. 442-51, has a good discussion of the problem, but he concluded that Paul was describing his own experience as a typical unregenerate Israelite. For another 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.

<sup>294</sup>See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contrast Between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):310-14; and Bruce, p. 144.

legalism called "nomism," but apart from law. It also proves that doing right requires more than just determining to do it. All of these insights are necessary in order 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."<sup>295</sup>

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.

<b>SOME RESULTS OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST IN ROMANS 6 AND 7</b>		
<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Six</b>	<b>Seven</b>
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. 7:7-12)
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. 7:13-24)
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)

### **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."<sup>296</sup>

"It is undoubtedly the chapter of chapters for the life of the believer . . ."<sup>297</sup>

<sup>295</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God*, p. 120.

<sup>296</sup>Godet, p. 295.

<sup>297</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 200.

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. This chapter contains the greatest concentration of references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, an average of one almost every two verses. Whereas there are about 30 occurrences of "I" in chapter 7, there are 17 references to the Holy Spirit in chapter 8. This chapter explains the benefits of sanctification made available through the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit who indwells every believer.<sup>298</sup>

"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."<sup>299</sup>

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

The writer proceeded to state the believer's condition and then to explain it.

#### **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, specifically 7:6. He reaffirmed justification as the indispensable basis for sanctification.<sup>300</sup> A Christian must believe that he or she has permanent acceptance with God before that one will grow much in grace and godliness.

"Romans 3:20 shows the 'therefore' of condemnation; but Romans 8:1 gives the 'therefore' of *no* condemnation . . ."<sup>301</sup>

"No condemnation" is different from freedom from judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). "No condemnation" (Gr. *katakrima*, penal servitude) 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!

<sup>298</sup>See Dillow, pp. 358-82.

<sup>299</sup>Harrison, p. 85.

<sup>300</sup>For 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.

<sup>301</sup>Wiersbe, 1:538.

"The Law condemns; but the believer has a new relationship to the Law, and therefore he cannot be condemned."<sup>302</sup>

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.

"Both the Spirit and sin and death are called the law because of the constancy of their influence and action."<sup>303</sup>

"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)."<sup>304</sup>

The "law of sin" is like the law of gravity; it pulls us down. But the "law of the Spirit" is like the law of aerodynamics; it overcomes the law of sin, lifts us up, and enables us to "fly" victoriously over the flesh.

So far in Romans (1:1—8:1), Paul only referred to the Holy Spirit once (5:5), but in this chapter he mentions Him 17 times.

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 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."<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup>Ibid.

<sup>303</sup>Mickelsen, p. 1205.

<sup>304</sup>Newell, p. 288.

<sup>305</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:282.

"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."<sup>306</sup>

"The law of double jeopardy" is a universally recognized principle of justice.

8:4 Here the purpose of the Incarnation appears in the context of the struggle of chapter 7. God fulfills the Law's requirements ("requirement") in us by His Spirit, who indwells and empowers us. However, this is not automatic simply 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."<sup>307</sup>

"The law's requirement will be fulfilled by the determination of the direction, the set, of our lives by the Spirit, by our being enabled again and again to decide for the Spirit and against the flesh, to turn our backs more and more upon our own insatiable egotism and to turn our faces more and more toward the freedom which the Spirit of God has given us."<sup>308</sup>

"To run and work the law commands,  
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands;  
But better news the gospel brings:  
It bids me fly, and gives me wings."<sup>309</sup>

"The importance of these verses [1-4] lies in the fact that they provide a summary of chs. v. to viii., and indicate in brief but sufficient form the secrets of Christian holiness."<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup>Wiersbe, 1:539.

<sup>307</sup>Moo, p. 485. Cf. Kevin W. McFadden, "The Fulfillment of the Law's *Dikaioma*: Another Look at Romans 8:1-4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (September 2009):483-97.

<sup>308</sup>Cranfield, 1:385.

<sup>309</sup>Writer unknown. Quoted in Bruce, p. 154.

<sup>310</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 205.

### 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. To regenerate means to give dead sinners spiritual life.

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 Holy Spirit (v. 2). Additional following references to "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) would therefore normally refer 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 seems to be in view here. Yet 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 to the end of verse 8, it seems clear that Paul was thinking of an unsaved person (cf. vv. 9-10). Evidently he wanted "to expose the flesh in its stark reality as being totally alien to God and his purpose."<sup>311</sup> 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 (*since* indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you"). Everyone who trusts in Jesus "Christ" in the age in which we live (Church Age) possesses the indwelling Holy "Spirit" (cf. Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:13).

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<sup>311</sup>Harrison, p. 89.

"Here the great mark of a true Christian is, that the Spirit of God dwells in him."<sup>312</sup>

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 time. But that cannot be because Paul clearly indicated that a person without the Spirit does not belong to Christ."<sup>313</sup>

8:10 Note the close affinity between the Spirit (of God) and the Son (Spirit of Christ) in this verse and the last. "If" is again "since." The Spirit's indwelling means that God indwells (cf. vv. 9, 11; Eph. 3:16-17).

"Spirit" ("the 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 evidently is 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!"<sup>314</sup>

The "body" represents the whole person, not just his or her physical shell. This was Paul's normal meaning when he used this word.<sup>315</sup> Here he meant by "is dead" that the body is mortal, that it remains *subject to death* "because of sin."

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 ("give life to") believers' "bodies."

"The Spirit is both the instrumental cause of the resurrection-act and the permanent substratum of the resurrection-life."<sup>316</sup>

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

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<sup>312</sup>Newell, p. 299.

<sup>313</sup>Mounce, pp. 178-79.

<sup>314</sup>Zane Hodges, "The Death/Life Option," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:11 (November 1991):3.

<sup>315</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s. v. "soma," by Eduard Schweizer, 7 (1971):1064.

<sup>316</sup>Gerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 169.

As noted above (6:6), sometimes Christians describe the change that has taken place in believers, when they trusted in Christ, as having received a *new nature*. The idea is that unbelievers have an old unregenerate nature, and that Christians now have two natures: the old nature and a new nature. Sometimes these two natures are seen warring against each other, like two lion cubs within the believer. I prefer a different explanation of the psychology of the Christian that, I think, is more biblical. Rather than getting a new nature, the New Testament says that we get the Holy Spirit (v. 9). God's nature now becomes a part of our total makeup, which already includes our old sinful human nature. The New Testament speaks of our "old man" (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), which refers to who we were before we trusted Christ. That "old man" contained a sinful human nature. But now we are to "put on the new man" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), which means that we are to live like the new people that we are, having received the Holy Spirit (though still possessing a sinful nature).

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

Paul proceeded to apply this truth, and then to point out evidence of the believer's new relationship to God.

### **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 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. Titus 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; 3:18).

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, as well as physical wholeness, 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."<sup>317</sup>

#### 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.<sup>318</sup> Paul believed that the believer who is aware of his or her secure position will be more effective in mortifying his or her flesh (cf. 6:1-11).

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). After believers come to Christ, the Holy Spirit continues to lead them in the moral will of God. The Holy Spirit leads every true child of God (Gal. 5:18). He goes before them and expects them to follow Him, as a shepherd expects his sheep to follow. However, we can choose to follow or not 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; Rom 8:16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 5:13).<sup>319</sup> Another view is that to be "led by the Spirit" here, and in Galatians 5:18, means that the Spirit determines the direction of one's life as a whole, rather than that He guides us.<sup>320</sup>

"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 . . ."<sup>321</sup>

<sup>317</sup>Newell, pp. 307, 309.

<sup>318</sup>On the link between this section and chapter 9 see George C. Gianoulis, "Is Sonship in Romans 8:14-17 a Link with Romans 9?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):70-83.

<sup>319</sup>See Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit*.

<sup>320</sup>E.g., Moo, p. 498.

<sup>321</sup>Newell, p. 310.

The Holy Spirit acts as a guide for the Christian by showing him or her the way to go, like a guide goes before hikers on a mountain pathway blazing a safe trail for them. However, as with hikers, Christians do not have to follow their Guide. We can turn aside, and sometimes do, taking a more dangerous path.

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 submit voluntarily, as "sons of God." The "spirit of adoption" 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).<sup>322</sup> 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.<sup>323</sup>

"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 institution is a Greco-Roman one, the underlying concept is rooted in the OT and Judaism [i.e., God's adoption of Israel]."<sup>324</sup>

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 otherwise subjective (cf. v. 14), while the latter is only subjective. Another view is that the Holy Spirit bears witness to God when we pray (v. 15).<sup>325</sup> Incidentally, this second reference to "spirit" (our) is probably the only one in Romans 8 that is not a reference to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>322</sup>See Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, p. 28.

<sup>323</sup>See Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (December 1969):458-66.

<sup>324</sup>Moo, p. 501. Cf. Bruce, p. 157; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 306-7.

<sup>325</sup>See Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, pp. 216; and Robert N. Wilkin, "Assurance by Inner Witness?" *Grace Evangelical Society News* 8:2 (March-April 1993):2-3.

The term "children" in Romans 8 identifies our family relationship based on regeneration, whereas "sons" stresses our legal standing based on adoption. We are both God's children, by new birth, and His sons, by adoption.

8:17 Being adopted "children" of God makes us His "heirs" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-4). We inherit along with Jesus Christ our Brother (v. 29). We inherit both sufferings now, as His disciples, and glory, most of which lies in the future (cf. 1 Pet. 4:13).<sup>326</sup> 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 in His sufferings now (Gr. *sumpaschomen*, any sufferings we may experience because we live for Him, not just those connected with our bearing verbal witness for Christ), we will also 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 somewhat proportionate 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).<sup>327</sup>

"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)."<sup>328</sup>

This verse is not teaching that experiencing glorification, the third stage of every believer's salvation, depends on our suffering for Jesus' sake. God will eventually glorify every Christian: those who take a stand for the Lord as well as 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.*"<sup>329</sup>

<sup>326</sup>See López, "A Study . . . Inheriting . . .," pp. 444-46.

<sup>327</sup>For a study of the variable factors involved in inheriting, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*.

<sup>328</sup>Dillow, p. 55. See also William N. W. Pass III, "A Reexamination of Calvin's Approach to Romans 8:17," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:677 (January-March 2013):69-81.

<sup>329</sup>Newell, p. 317.

### **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.<sup>330</sup>

8:18 In the light of eternity, we should view the cost of suffering with Jesus Christ now as insignificant ("not worthy to be compared"), in view of "the glory" that lies ahead for us (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17). Paul again used a word, *pathemata*, which means "sufferings"—for any reason and in any form—because we are His sons. 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 (intensely or longingly straining or looking) in anticipation of the great day when God will fully redeem it too (cf. Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). Then God will reveal His sons ("the sons of God") 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."<sup>331</sup>

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.

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<sup>330</sup>See Don N. Howell Jr., "The Center of Pauline Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):50-70.

<sup>331</sup>Newell, p. 320.

8:21 In view of prophecies concerning creation's restoration during Messiah's earthly reign, that time was probably in Paul's mind (e.g., Jer. 31:12-14; 33). 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 "whole 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 this sense of groaning and anticipation that Paul described the whole creation as feeling. God will fully redeem both it and us finally. However, only the saints have the "first fruits" of the Spirit.

God commanded the Israelites to present a portion of their harvest that ripened first ("first fruits") as an offering to Him (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.

Like the first fruits, 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).

"The 'adoption' here is the full manifestation of the status of believers when they are invested as sons and daughters of God (cf. verses 14-17) and enter on the inheritance which is theirs by virtue of that status. 'The redemption of our bodies' is the resurrection, a theme on which Paul had recently enlarged in 2 Corinthians 4:7—5:10."<sup>332</sup>

8:24-25 In the meantime, we should look forward with "hope" to what God has promised, and patiently endure ("with perseverance") our 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."<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>332</sup>Bruce, pp. 164-65.

<sup>333</sup>Sanday 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 one. 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. But we struggle with exactly how to pray most effectively, and exactly what to pray about. 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).<sup>334</sup> However, what the precise will of God is, is often hard for us to ascertain. The Holy Spirit then comes to our aid: "He intercedes for us." "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.<sup>335</sup>

"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 are not best for us—we need not despair, for we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession 'on our behalf.'"<sup>336</sup>

<sup>334</sup>See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>335</sup>See Cranfield, 1:423.

<sup>336</sup>Moo, p. 526.

Imagine a loving parent seeking to help a child with a speech problem or hearing impairment. As the youngster struggles to express his feelings and desires, the parent imparts knowledge, and with his own lips, carefully tries to formulate what the child wants to say. This is a picture of how the Holy Spirit catches up our deepest longings and aspirations, and brings them in line with the Father's ultimate purposes for us.

8:27 The Father understands the Spirit's intercession for the saints, even though we ourselves cannot hear it. We can be assured 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 (or need), and He will respond according to His will.<sup>337</sup>

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!"<sup>338</sup>

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 that they culminate in the blessing of His children (cf. vv. 26-27).

"All things" means just that: everything. 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 called"), "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.

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<sup>337</sup>See Curtis C. Mitchell, "The Holy Spirit's Intercessory Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:555 (July-September 1982):230-42.

<sup>338</sup>Newell, 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 than causing 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): Satan, sin, and sinners. Even though God permits or allows bad things to happen, Scripture never lays the blame for these things on God, and neither should we.

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, to choose to bless someone (cf. ch. 9; 1 Pet. 1:20). Notice that it is only those whom He foreknows that He predestines, not everyone. This indicates that a "limited" foreknowledge is in view, not just general knowledge of everyone and everything, which God possesses. Foreknowledge here does not mean simply knowledge that precedes an event. If 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, or blameworthy because bad things happen. The reason for God's choice of the elect 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."<sup>339</sup>

"Predestined" means that God determined the destiny of the elect previously, specifically, before Creation (Eph. 1:3-4). That destiny is 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

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<sup>339</sup>Mounce, pp. 188-89.



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 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."<sup>340</sup>

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. "Firstborn" 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."<sup>341</sup>

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). Bruce suggested that perhaps Paul was imitating the Hebrew prophetic past tense, in which a future event is spoken of as past because of the certainty of its coming (cf. Jude 14).<sup>342</sup> 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, in order to stress His sovereign working to bring the believer to His goal.<sup>343</sup>

"The argument, when condensed, comes to this: that the very ones He foreknew, these, without the loss of one, He glorified."<sup>344</sup>

"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

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<sup>340</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):182.

<sup>341</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 183. See also Calvin, 2:13:2.

<sup>342</sup>Bruce, p. 168.

<sup>343</sup>On the apparent conflict between God's sovereignty and human freedom, see Lewis, pp. 52-53.

<sup>344</sup>Stifler, p. 149.

salvation along with illumination, through which the elect rightly perceive the gospel and inevitably trust in Jesus Christ."<sup>345</sup>

"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."<sup>346</sup>

### **5. Our eternal security 8:31-39**

In this climactic section, the apostle developed the fact that God will not lose one person whom He has foreknown, and he gloried in this great truth. He asked and answered seven questions to drive home this truth.

"Nowhere in the annals of sacred literature do we find anything to match the power and beauty of this remarkable paean of praise."<sup>347</sup>

"This whole passage . . . strikes all thoughtful interpreters and readers, as transcending almost every thing in language . . ."<sup>348</sup>

". . . God's, or Christ's, love is the motif of this paragraph, mentioned three times (vv. 35, 37, 39; cf. Rom. 5:5-8)."<sup>349</sup>

8:31           The key to the believer's security is: "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 as we look forward to the future. He will certainly complete His work of salvation by glorifying us in the future (cf. Phil. 1:6). Nobody and nothing can stand in His way: "Who is against us?"

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 be assured that He will also do whatever else may be necessary ("give us all things") 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!*"<sup>350</sup>

<sup>345</sup>Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):218.

<sup>346</sup>Moo, p. 536.

<sup>347</sup>Mounce, p. 173.

<sup>348</sup>R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1163.

<sup>349</sup>Moo, p. 539.

<sup>350</sup>Newell, p. 337.

"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 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."<sup>351</sup>

8:33 The question that opens this verse ("Who will bring a charge against God's elect?"), along with the two others that follow in verses 34 and 35, expands on 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, when he does this, he gets nowhere with God, because all sin is against God ultimately (Ps. 51:4), who has already acquitted the elect. Therefore God, not Satan, is the only one in the position to charge the believer with guilt. But He will not do so, because He is *for us*. The Father already provided His Son to pay the penalty for our sins, Christ already paid the penalty, and God has already declared us righteous.

". . . 'to justify' means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed."<sup>352</sup>

8:34 Jesus Christ ("Christ Jesus") 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 ("was raised") from the dead, and is therefore able to give life to those who trust Him (cf. John 11:25; 14:19). Third, He has ascended to the position of supreme authority in heaven, "at the right hand of God," where He represents us (v. 29). Fourth, He presently "intercedes for us" to the Father for our welfare (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25; cf. Rom. 8:26).

The 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.<sup>353</sup>

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

<sup>351</sup>S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "Behold the Lamb: The Gospel and Substitutionary Atonement," in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 134.

<sup>352</sup>Calvin, 3:11:3.

<sup>353</sup>See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82.

with His unique Son (cf. John 16:33). Paul listed seven things, in increasing intensity, that a believer might experience—and he himself experienced them all (2 Cor. 11:23-28)—that some might think could come between a believer and Christ's "love."<sup>354</sup>

- 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. "In all these things" is possibly the translation of a Hebraism meaning "despite (in spite of) all these things."<sup>355</sup> 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).
- 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 ("neither death, nor life"). Neither helpful nor hostile angelic beings ("nor angels, nor principalities") can change God's commitment to us. Nothing that the present or future may hold ("nor things present, nor things to come") can do so either. No force of any kind ("nor powers") can remove us from His loving care. Paul listed the extremities of existence in this verse and the next.<sup>356</sup>
- 8:39 Space ("nor height, nor depth") cannot separate us from His loving care, either. Finally, nothing in all creation ("nor any other created thing") can drive a wedge between the loving God and His redeemed people. That has to include the behavior and belief of His own children as well (John 10:28-29). Not even the redeemed can remove themselves from God's love, which Christ Jesus has secured for them!<sup>357</sup> God's *love* for His own implies His *choice* of His own for Himself, since He chooses to set His love on whom He will (cf. Song of Sol. 2:2; 4:1; Mal. 1:2; et al.).

If I hold a wooden pencil in my hands, I can break it easily. But if I insert the pencil inside a stout wooden dowel with a hole running through it, I will not be able to break it. Just so, Christians are safe because they are "in Christ."

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 (cf. Phil.

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<sup>354</sup>Witmer, p. 475.

<sup>355</sup>Bruce, p. 171.

<sup>356</sup>Witmer, p. 475.

<sup>357</sup>See Robert G. Gromacki, *Salvation Is Forever*, p. 72.

1:6). 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*. Our good works did not earn us salvation, and our bad works cannot take it from 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 or her salvation, any more than sinful conduct can separate a beloved child from his relationship to his loving father.

Paul's paean (hymn) 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."<sup>358</sup>

"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."<sup>359</sup>

## **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 He set aside His chosen people, the Jews? It certainly looks as though something separated them from His love (e.g., the Holocaust). 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, which deals with the righteousness of God.

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. The theological term that describes a vindication of God is "theodicy." 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 glorify Israel.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>358</sup>Godet, p. 335.

<sup>359</sup>Lenski, p. 578.

<sup>360</sup>For a brief tracing of Paul's argument through these chapters, see Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 495-99.

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 (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:5-6; et al.) and each Christian (John 6:37, 44-45, 64-65; 10:26; Acts 13:48; 16:14; et al.).<sup>361</sup> Unsaved Israel, viewed as a whole, as well as many unsaved 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.

Throughout this whole section, Paul was speaking of "Israel" as the Jews only, not *all* the people of God in general throughout history, as most covenant theologians interpret "Israel," especially in chapter 11.

#### **A. ISRAEL'S PAST ELECTION CH. 9**

Paul began by tracing God's dealings with the nation of Israel in the past. He first reminded his readers that God had blessed Israel (vv. 1-5). Then he pointed out that God's choice to bless Israel in a special way did not arise out of Israel's heritage (vv. 6-10) or out of Israel's actions or behavior (vv. 11-13). His choice to bless Israel arose out of His own love and sovereign choice to bless the Jews more than other people. Israel's disobedience did not lead Him to cast her off permanently. God had been merciful to Israel. Israel's rejection of Christ led God to show mercy to Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews (in the church).

"No conjunction or particle connects the two chapters, and the tone shifts dramatically from celebration (8:31-39) to lamentation (9:1-3)."<sup>362</sup>

#### **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—with a triple oath! He claimed two witnesses that testified he was "telling the 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.

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<sup>361</sup>See 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.

<sup>362</sup>Moo, p. 555.

"No man will ever even begin to try to save men unless he first loves them."<sup>363</sup>

- 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 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 ("kinsmen according to the flesh"). 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.<sup>364</sup> 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. 14:1-2). 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 for Israel that corresponds to the teaching of Christ for Christians. The Jewish sacrificial system ("temple service") 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."<sup>365</sup>

- 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.

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<sup>363</sup>Barclay, p. 130.

<sup>364</sup>See Cranfield, 2:460-61, for a summary of the way "Israel" was used in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Judaism.

<sup>365</sup>Wiersbe, 1:543.

"The meaning and extent of these promises are the linchpin in Paul's interpretation of salvation history; see 9:6b-13; 11:15; and especially 11:28, which forms with this verse an 'inclusio' surrounding Paul's discussion in these chapters."<sup>366</sup>

The Messiah ("the Christ") 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. Phil. 2:10-11; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:2).<sup>367</sup>

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 determined 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. There 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," like 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."<sup>368</sup>

<sup>366</sup>Moo, pp. 564-65.

<sup>367</sup>See Bruce, p. 176; and Robertson, 4:381.

<sup>368</sup>S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "Evidence from Romans 9—11," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 203.



Even though all the physical 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, namely, *saved* Israelites. Paul had previously pointed out this distinction between the outward Jew and the inward Jew (2:28-29). Non-dispensationalists, who believe that the church replaces Israel in God's program (i.e., "replacement theology"), frequently appeal to this verse for support. They take the first "Israel" here as the "old Israel," and the second "Israel" as the "new Israel," the church.<sup>369</sup> Saved Gentiles are also Abraham's seed, but they are not in view here. Paul was considering only two kinds of Israelites: natural (ethnic) Israelites, both saved and unsaved, and spiritual Israelites, saved natural Israelites.

Normal interpretation (of references to "Israel" throughout Scripture) identifies Israel as the physical descendants of the patriarch Israel (i.e., Jacob). While Scripture sometimes ascribes more than one referent to words, it always gives clues as to which meaning is in view. For example, the word "flesh" has three referents in Scripture: the physical material that covers our bodies (our skin), all that Christians were in Adam (before we became Christians), and sinful human nature. Clues to the referent are usually in the context of the passage in which the word appears, either the near context or a larger context. Dispensationalists believe that Scripture gives no warrant for interpreting "Israel" as anything other than Jews, saved or unsaved.

9:7 Even though God promised to bless "Abraham's descendants," it was only one main branch of his family ("through Isaac") that He singled out for special blessing. God's special elective purpose applied only to Isaac and his line of descendants. This reference to God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael is the first of three Old Testament illustrations of God's sovereignty. The other two are Jacob/Esau (vv. 10-13) and Pharaoh (vv. 14-18).

9:8 It was not all the natural children of Abraham ("children of the flesh") that God had in mind when He spoke of uniquely blessing Abraham's seed. It was only regarding the children born *supernaturally*—in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham about seed—that He was speaking, namely: Isaac's descendants ("children of the promise").

"What counts is grace, not race."<sup>370</sup>

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 ("at this time"). His unusual birth confirmed God's choice of Isaac, as the channel of special blessing, to his parents.

<sup>369</sup>For further refutation of this interpretation, see Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 195-98.

<sup>370</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 238.

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 suggest that Isaac was obviously the natural son through whom blessing would come, since he was the *first* son born to both Abraham and Sarah. That was not true of Jacob. Furthermore, Esau and Jacob both had the same mother *as well as* the same father, so that was not a factor, as an objector might claim it was in Isaac and Ishmael's case. Also, Jacob and Esau might have normally 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 ("anything good or bad"), 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.

"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.'"<sup>371</sup>

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 claim that election results from prior knowledge, that God chooses a person for salvation having foreseen that he or she will believe the gospel.<sup>372</sup>

"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."<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>371</sup>Moo, p. 583.

<sup>372</sup>See Calvin, 3:21:5 and 6.

<sup>373</sup>Moo, p. 587. Cf. Cranfield, 2:480. See also Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26; and John 12:25.

"The strong contrast is a Semitic idiom that heightens the comparison by stating it in absolute terms."<sup>374</sup>

"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!'"<sup>375</sup>

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 or group over another. In this pericope, Paul dealt with the justice of God in doing what He did.

"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)."<sup>376</sup>

9:14           The apostle first flatly denied the charge that God is unjust: "There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" 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. 32), 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."<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>374</sup>Mounce, p. 199.

<sup>375</sup>Newell, p. 364.

<sup>376</sup>Moo, pp. 549-50.

<sup>377</sup>Newell, p. 355.

- 9:16 It is not man's desire or effort ("man who wills or . . . runs") that causes God to be merciful, but His own sovereign choice ("depends . . . on God who has mercy"). God is under no obligation to show mercy or 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 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 that 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.

"Paul introduced this quotation with the words, For the Scripture says, for he equated the words of God with the words of Scripture."<sup>378</sup>

- 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. Similarly, a person may choose to drink poison or he may choose not to, but if he chooses to drink it, inevitable consequences will follow.

"Neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself."<sup>379</sup>

"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."<sup>380</sup>

"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."<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>378</sup>Witmer, p. 477.

<sup>379</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 361.

<sup>380</sup>Moo, p. 597.

<sup>381</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 599. See also Dorian G. Coover Cox, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:651 (July-September 2006):292-311.

". . . 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."<sup>382</sup>

Paul did not include the fact that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, which Moses plainly 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.

"The reconciliation of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is beyond our power. The Bible states and emphasizes both, and then leaves them. We shall be wise if we do the same."<sup>383</sup>

#### **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 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—"Why does God still blame us?"—and then answered it in the verses that follow.

9:20 In the first place, it is presumptuous for human beings, the objects of divine judgment, to sit in judgment on their Judge ("talk back to God"). 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."<sup>384</sup>

9:21 The illustration in this verse clarifies the inappropriateness of this critical attitude. Clearly Israel is in view as the "pottery" 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. Actually 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."<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>382</sup>Newell, p. 369.

<sup>383</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 257. Cf. p. 266.

<sup>384</sup>Newell, p. 371.

<sup>385</sup>Wiersbe, 1:545.

- 9:22 People prepare themselves "for destruction" by pursuing sin (ch. 1; cf. Matt. 7:13; 1 Thess. 2:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:3; Phil. 3:19). However, the verb translated "prepared" in this verse is probably a passive rather than a middle, though the form of the passive and middle tenses is identical in Greek. The passive is much more common in the New Testament. Paul probably meant that God prepares *some* people for destruction. Pharaoh was one of the "objects of wrath." Paul had in mind those in Israel who had opposed the gospel in his day. God was patient and merciful with them (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."<sup>386</sup>
- These vessels ("objects") include both Jews and Gentiles (cf. 1:16; 2:10-11; 3:22).
- "Men fit themselves for hell; but it is God that fits men for heaven."<sup>387</sup>
- 9:25-26 The inclusion of Gentiles ("not My people") in this group is in harmony with Old Testament prophecy. It foretold the calling of the Gentiles and the preservation of a Jewish remnant. 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.<sup>388</sup> Others claim that this was an initial partial fulfillment that does not eliminate a future complete fulfillment.<sup>389</sup> A better explanation, I think, is that Paul saw an analogy between God's present calling of Gentiles and His future calling of Israel.<sup>390</sup> 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 ("children of the living 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

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<sup>386</sup>Moo, p. 609.

<sup>387</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 261.

<sup>388</sup>E.g., McClain, p. 183; and John A. Battle Jr., "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:25-26," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981):115-29.

<sup>389</sup>E.g., Darrell 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; and *idem*, "The 'People of God' in Romans 9:25-26," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (January-March 1995):42-59.

<sup>390</sup>Johnson, "Evidence from . . .," p. 209-11; Witmer, p. 479.

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 ("thoroughly and quickly") as He had obliterated "Sodom" and "Gomorrah." The remnant of believers ("descendants") 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 ("pursued") the prize of "righteousness," the righteousness God requires for acceptance by Him, but crossed the finish line behind the Gentiles, who were not running as hard. Israel as a whole hoped to gain righteousness by doing good works ("law"-keeping), but believing Gentiles obtained the prize by believing the gospel ("faith"). Again, the contrast between law and faith recurs.

"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."<sup>391</sup>

9:32-33 Israel as a whole, excluding the believing remnant, failed to gain a righteous standing before God because she tried to win it "with (by) works." A "stumbling stone" on the racetrack 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 sent 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.

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<sup>391</sup>Harrison, p. 109.

## **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, specifically, 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 develop that subject further in this section.

10:1 This pericope opens with Paul returning to his feelings of compassionate concern ("my heart's desire and my prayer") 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."<sup>392</sup>

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 had 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 (was "not in accordance with") "knowledge," knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah (1 Tim. 1:13).

10:3 The Jews were ignorant of "the righteousness" that comes from "(of) God" as a gift (1:17). They sought to earn righteousness by keeping the Law ("to establish their own"). Instead, they should have humbly received (submitted to) 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."<sup>393</sup>

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" ("culmination" NIV) 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 10:10-15; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:6-18; 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).

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<sup>392</sup>Mounce, pp. 206-7.

<sup>393</sup>Newell, p. 389.



"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."<sup>394</sup>

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 that 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 people would recognize their inability to be good enough to earn acceptance by God for salvation, and subsequently 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 the Law 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 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.*"<sup>395</sup>

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).<sup>396</sup>

10:5 Paul supported his contention that justification results from faith in Christ (v. 4) through verse 13. He used the Law (Deut. 30:6, 11, 14) to prove that Moses showed that it was futile to trust in law-keeping for salvation.

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<sup>394</sup>David K. Lowery, "Christ, the End of the Law in Romans 10:4," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 246.

<sup>395</sup>Newell, p. 393.

<sup>396</sup>See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):227-33; Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66; and 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).

"Moses" revealed that "the man" who practiced the "righteousness" commanded in the Law would "live" (Lev. 18:5; 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 (through or based on) 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" in order "to bring the promised Messiah (Christ) 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 (bring Christ) up" from the death that the prophets had predicted He would die. God had already accomplished 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 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 first, and then secondly acknowledges his or her belief (i.e., confesses; cf. v. 10; 2 Cor. 4:13-14).

"But the two formulations interpret each other, so that what is to be both believed and confessed is the more precisely defined."<sup>397</sup>

"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

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<sup>397</sup>Cranfield, 2:527.

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*). In the Roman world, faithful citizens were increasingly being expected to acknowledge that *Caesar* was Lord (divine). So the original recipients of this epistle, especially, had to face the issue of who really is divine, Jesus or Caesar.

"We take it that, for Paul, the confession that Jesus is Lord meant the acknowledgment that Jesus shares the name and the nature, the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and eternity of the one and only true God."<sup>398</sup>

"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."<sup>399</sup>

The fact that "Jesus" is "Lord" (God and Savior) became clear when He arose from the dead (cf. v. 7). Jesus' resurrection was the proof that He really was the divine Messiah, God's Holy One (cf. Ps. 16:10-11). 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 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. However, if he disbelieved in Jesus' resurrection because he did not believe in the possibility of bodily resurrection, he probably would

<sup>398</sup>Ibid., 2:529. Cf. Bruce, p. 176; and Mickelsen, pp. 1214-15.

<sup>399</sup>Harrison, p. 112. See also Ryrie, *So Great . . .*, pp. 70-73; idem, *Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 169-81; Roy B. Zuck, "Cheap Grace?" *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):4-7; and Constable, "The Gospel . . .," p. 209.

experience regeneration. In the latter case, he would just need teaching on this subject.

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., imputed righteousness, justification, and positional sanctification). Testimony to one's belief in Jesus Christ normally follows, and normally is verbal ("with the mouth"). Paul was describing the normal consequence of belief. Witmer wrote that the confession is to God.<sup>400</sup> One's confession that Jesus is Lord would be to God initially (i.e., expressing trust in Christ to the Father), but most interpreters have believed that the confession in view goes beyond God and includes other people as well. This seems to be a reasonable conclusion, since the confession is to be made "with the mouth."

In what sense does this confession (profession) result in salvation? Paul obviously did not mean that confession of Jesus Christ secures acceptance with God, since he had 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.<sup>401</sup> It also saves him or her from the loss of reward, that those who are unwilling to identify themselves with Him, will suffer (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 ("whoever"). When the elect "call on" God,

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<sup>400</sup>Witmer, p. 481.

<sup>401</sup>See Dillow, pp. 122-24.

they are responding to His calling of them (8:28-30). The only prayer of an unbeliever that God 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."<sup>402</sup>

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), a Christian proclaiming his or her faith.

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: "Who has believed our report?" (cf. Isa. 53:1).

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<sup>402</sup>Ibid., 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).<sup>403</sup> It could also refer to the message concerning ("about") 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."<sup>404</sup>

10:18 This rhetorical question ("They have never heard, have they?") 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: "Their voice has gone out . . . to the ends of the world". Every human being hears the testimony of nature (ch. 1), 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."<sup>405</sup>

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 (know) 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 ("that which is not a nation"). 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 even more Gentiles accepted it. This response was not due to ignorance but to deliberate rejection.

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<sup>403</sup>Cranfield, 2:537.

<sup>404</sup>Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 31. Cf. pp. 37-43.

<sup>405</sup>Moo, p. 667.

- 10:20        Isaiah 65:1-2 supports Deuteronomy 32:21, with emphasis on the fact that the Gentiles came to God ("I was found by those who did not seek Me").
- 10:21        The Jews, on the other hand, refused to come to Him—even when He reached out to draw them to Himself ("All the day long I have stretched out My hands"). The reason God has temporarily set them aside is their stubborn ("obstinate") 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 God's provision of Jesus Christ. In chapter 11, Paul revealed God's future plans for the nation that, when accomplished, will fully vindicate His righteousness. God has a future for the physical descendants of Jacob as a people.

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.<sup>406</sup>

"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."<sup>407</sup>

"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."<sup>408</sup>

#### **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. A future for Israel is possible, but more than that, it is certain based on God's promise.

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<sup>406</sup>See Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 250-63, for a good presentation of Israel's future restoration in this chapter, and Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, pp. 310-17.

<sup>407</sup>Stifler, p. 183.

<sup>408</sup>Wiersbe, 1:550.

- 11:1 The opening question carries on the diatribe rhetorical style of 10:18 and 19. "God has not [totally] rejected" the Israelites, even though they have, on the whole, rejected Him. The proof of this is that Paul himself was a member of the believing remnant, being a Christian Jew. Many Jewish Christians today prefer to refer to themselves as Messianic Jews. Paul even came from the small and sometimes despised "tribe of Benjamin" (cf. Judg. 19—21), yet God had saved him.
- 11:2 The fact that Paul and other believing Jews have had faith, though they have been relatively few compared to the total number of ethnic Jews, proves that God has not completely rejected the people whom He had elected (i.e., foreknew, cf. 8:29). In Elijah's day, Israel's departure from God was widespread.
- 11:3-4 Elijah wrongly concluded that he was the only Israelite who had remained faithful to the Lord ("I alone am left"). God assured him that He had preserved "seven thousand" 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."<sup>409</sup>
- 11:5 Likewise, in both 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 identified 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 a special 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 had built up over the Israelites that made them less sensitive to God.<sup>410</sup>
- ". . . God's hardening permanently binds people in the sin that they have chosen for themselves."<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>409</sup>Harrison, p. 117.

<sup>410</sup>H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>411</sup>Moo, p. 681.



"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 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)."<sup>412</sup>

- 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.<sup>413</sup> 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 ("a stumbling block"). The enemies in view were the Lord's enemies, as well as the king's, since David was the Lord's anointed. This is what actually 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. Acts 15:10). The Greek phrase *dia pantos* usually means "continually." It probably means that here as well, rather than "forever."<sup>414</sup> 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, He 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

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<sup>412</sup>J. Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 136.

<sup>413</sup>Robertson, 4:393.

<sup>414</sup>Cranfield, 2:552.

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.

11:11 Another rhetorical question marks another advance in the movement of Paul's thought: "They did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" 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.

To illustrate, sometimes parents will reward one of their children for being obedient, but will withhold the reward from another one of their children who has been disobedient. The intent of that treatment is, in part, to motivate the disobedient child to become more obedient (cf. Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24).

11:12 Paul here anticipated the national repentance of Israel that he articulated later (v. 26). God had 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—"their fulfillment"—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.'"<sup>415</sup>

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 ("mov[ing] to jealousy my fellow countrymen") of God's blessings on Gentile converts. He was thereby playing a part in bringing some Jews to faith ('and save some of them').

"The Gentiles are not saved merely for their own sake, but for the sake of God's election of Israel."<sup>416</sup>

"However strange it may sound, the way to salvation of Israel is by the mission to the Gentiles."<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>415</sup>Moo, p. 690.

<sup>416</sup>James Daane, *The Freedom of God*, p. 145.

<sup>417</sup>Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, p. 301.

11:15 When Israel returns to God and He accepts her, the results for all humankind will be comparable to "life from the dead" (cf. Ezek. 37). God's blessings on humanity now ("reconciliation") 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: Christian Jews. The "lump" or "batch" refers to the whole nation: Israel. God has consecrated both groups to Himself.

The "root" and "branches" must refer to the Abrahamic Covenant, and the believing and unbelieving Gentiles and Jews, respectively, in view of how Paul proceeded to develop this illustration in verses 17-24.<sup>418</sup> Moo saw the root as the patriarchs and God's promises to them.<sup>419</sup>

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 Gentile world.<sup>420</sup> The "rich root" of the cultivated tree, Israel, probably corresponds to the Abrahamic Covenant, from which all of God's blessings and the very life of the nation sprang. Another view is that the rich root refers to the patriarchs themselves: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We might add to the illustration by saying that the roots derive their nourishment from God Himself.

Paul said that God "grafted" Gentiles "in among" the Jews. They "became partaker[s] 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 of distinction. The olive tree is not the church, or the so-called "new Israel," 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 (Gentiles), even though they benefit from blessings that come through Israel (e.g., the Messiah, the Scriptures, etc.).

A common misunderstanding of this figure is that the olive tree is a symbol of all believers throughout history, all the people of God. The natural branches, in this view, represent Israel, and the grafted in branches represent the church. The Old Testament use of the olive tree as a symbol of the nation of Israel argues against this view. Furthermore, this verse says "some of the" natural olive branches (Israelites, according to this view) "were broken off" the tree. And if the tree represents all believers, this must mean that some believing Israelites have ceased to be part of the people of God. This of course is not true.

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<sup>418</sup>See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 286.

<sup>419</sup>Moo, p. 698.

<sup>420</sup>Bruce, p. 204.

- 11:18 Gentile believers should not feel superior to ("arrogant toward") Jewish unbelievers, the branches that God has broken off the tree (Israel; vv. 17, 19). Gentile believers might conclude that their salvation is what was responsible for the continuing existence of Israel (cf. v. 14). Actually it is God's faithfulness in honoring the Abrahamic Covenant that is responsible for that ("the root that supports" them).
- 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. Of course, it was always God's purpose to bless Gentiles (Gen. 12:1-3). However, the Gentile believer who may feel superior to the unbelieving Jew needs to remember something: The only reason he is where he is (partaking of blessing from the Abrahamic Covenant), is because he has simply believed God ("you stand by your faith"). He is not there because he has done some meritorious work that would be a ground for boasting (cf. 5:2), therefore the warning: "Do not be conceited, but fear."
- 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 could lose his salvation. Paul's point was: if God set aside Jews ("did not spare the natural branches") temporarily, because of their unbelief, He could do the same with Gentiles because of their boasting.
- 11:22 "Those who fell" are the unbelieving Jews, and "you" are the believing Gentiles. The positions are reversible. Gentiles can become object of God's sternness ("severity"), and Jews 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 believing Gentiles (v. 17), and belief could result in Him grafting in believing Jews in the future ("God is able to graft them in again"). In the illustration, the whole trunk of the cultivated olive tree represents Israel and the natural branches are Jews.
- 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 (believing Gentiles) onto the trunk (Israel), it should not be hard to believe that He will do the easier thing. The easier thing is restoring the pruned "natural" branches of the cultivated tree (unbelieving Jews who will come to faith in Christ) to their former position (as members of Israel).

"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."<sup>421</sup>

Obviously the branches formerly broken off do not represent the same individuals as those grafted in in the future. They are Jews who, in the former case, did not believe and, in the latter case, will believe. However, the grafting in of Jews in the future will not involve the breaking off of Gentile believers.

### **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. That is, He can restore the nation of Israel, which now has many natural branches (unbelieving Jews) broken off, to its former condition as a fruitful nation in the world. Now we learn that He is not only *able* to do it, but He *will* do it. This section is the climax of everything 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."<sup>422</sup>

11:25 A "mystery" in the New Testament refers to a truth previously unknown but now revealed. In the "mystery religions" of the Greco-Roman world, initiates received secret information that was unknown to non-initiates. A modern counterpart is the "secret societies" (e.g., the Masons, the Eastern Star, et al.). That special revelation in this case was that Israel (ethnic Jews) would experience a "partial hardening" from God "until the full number (fullness)" of elect "Gentiles" would be saved ("has come in"). God's plan to put the nation of Israel aside temporarily should not make Gentile believers think too highly of themselves ("be wise in [their] own estimation"). God designed this plan to display His own glory.

We must be careful not to equate the modern State of Israel with the Israel spoken of in the Bible. Biblical Israel was a sovereign nation among nations in the world that lost its sovereignty when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Whereas some Jews today have organized the State of Israel, God has promised that He will yet cause the great majority of Jewish people to believe on His Son and return to the Promised Land as believers in Him. This will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth. He will then reestablish Israel as the people of God and reign over them as their Davidic King (cf. Zech. 12—14). The existent State of Israel is presently not enjoying the abundant blessings God promised to bring on Israel when Christ returns.

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<sup>421</sup>Liddon, p. 314.

<sup>422</sup>Harrison, 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 Jewish rejection (setting aside) have experienced salvation, God will precipitate a revival of faith among the Jews. Even though some Jews trust in Christ now, God is not presently working through them *as Israel*—as He will in the future (i.e., in the Millennium), after multitudes of them turn to faith in Christ. He is now working through the church.

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."<sup>423</sup>

"It is impossible to entertain an exegesis which understands 'Israel' here in a different sense from 'Israel' in verse 25 ([that is, it is impossible to understand "Israel" in verse 26 as meaning] 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel')."<sup>424</sup>

"All Israel" means Israel as a whole, in contrast to the relatively small believing remnant of Jews. 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).<sup>425</sup> 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 is not another name for the church. John Calvin believed "Israel" meant "the church," and covenant theologians have followed in his train.<sup>426</sup> "All Israel" does not refer to all Jews who have been believers throughout history, either.<sup>427</sup> If that were what Paul meant, this statement would be irrelevant to his argument.<sup>428</sup>

"Thus" or "so" here 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.<sup>429</sup>

The quotation from Isaiah 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).<sup>430</sup>

<sup>423</sup>Moo, p. 719. See H. Wayne House, "The Future of National Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):643-81, for a discussion of the major views.

<sup>424</sup>Bruce, p. 209.

<sup>425</sup>Ibid. Cf. Mickelsen, p. 1218.

<sup>426</sup>See John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, p. 255.

<sup>427</sup>For defense of this view, see Ben L. Merkle, "Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000):709-21.

<sup>428</sup>Murray, 2:96-98.

<sup>429</sup>Cranfield, 2:576.

<sup>430</sup>See Toussaint and Quine, pp. 146-47.

"Israel . . . was chosen for a fourfold mission: (1) to witness to the unity of God in the midst of universal idolatry (cp. Dt. 6:4 with Isa. 43:10-12); (2) to illustrate to the nations the blessedness of serving the true God (Dt. 33:26-29; 1 Chr. 17:20-21; Ps. 144:15); (3) to receive, preserve, and transmit the Scriptures (Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 3:1-2); and (4) to be the human channel for the Messiah (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 22:18; 28:10-14; 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3)."<sup>431</sup>

11:27           Isaiah 27:9 also predicted a great removal of Israel's "sins" (the sins of believing Jews when Christ returns), 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 combine to establish the future of ethnic Israel as a glorious hope of both Israel and the church."<sup>432</sup>

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, additionally, 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 ("beloved for the sake of the fathers").

11:29           The special privileges that God gave Israel are probably what Paul intended by his reference here to God's "gifts" (cf. 9:4-5). These privileges have intimate connection with God's "calling" of Israel for a special purpose. God will not withdraw these from Israel (they "are irrevocable"). He did not choose Israel for her goodness, and He will not abandon her for her badness. Paul said virtually the same thing about the security of individual Christians in 8:31-39.

11:30-31       These verses are a warning to Gentile believers. Gentiles should beware of becoming critical of God for planning to bless the Jews 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 that we who are Gentiles could enjoy salvation (Gen. 12:1-3).

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<sup>431</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1226.

<sup>432</sup>Johnson, "Evidence from . . .," p. 219.

11:32 The conclusion of the matter is this: As everyone has been disobedient ("shut up . . . in disobedience"), Gentiles and Jews alike, so God will "show mercy to all" as well (cf. 3:9; Gal. 3:22). That is, He will show mercy to "all" *without distinction* (Gentiles and Jews alike), not all without exception (cf. 9:17). 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."<sup>433</sup>

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."<sup>434</sup>

"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 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.'"<sup>435</sup>

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.

"Here theology turns to poetry. Here the seeking of the mind turns to the adoration of the heart."<sup>436</sup>

11:33 God's "wisdom" is His ability to arrange His plan so it results in good for both Jews and Gentiles and His own glory. His "knowledge" testifies to His ability to construct such a plan—His divine ingenuity. His decisions ("judgments") spring from logic that extends beyond human ability to comprehend. His procedures ("ways") are so complex that humans cannot discover them without the aid of divine revelation.

<sup>433</sup>Moo, p. 737.

<sup>434</sup>J. Lanier Burns, "The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 216.

<sup>435</sup>Saucy, *The Case . . .*, p. 23. The quotation is from Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 201.

<sup>436</sup>Barclay, p. 167.



- 11:34 Paul agreed with Isaiah again (Isa. 40:13-14). No one can fully know God's "mind." God is so wise that He has no need of counselors ("Who became His counselor?").
- 11:35 Job's observation that God has never needed to depend on human assistance—which would put 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 (accomplish His will) without human agents. He can.
- 11:36 God is the *source* from which "all things" come ("from Him"), the *means* by which "all things" happen ("through Him"), and the *goal* toward which "all things" are moving ("to Him"). He is likewise the originator, sustainer, and finisher of everything ultimately (cf. Col. 1:16-17). In view of all these attributes, roles, and redemptive works (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.

In chapter 11, Paul cited five witnesses to Israel's future salvation: himself (v. 1), Elijah (vv. 2-10), the Gentiles (vv. 11-15), the patriarchs (vv. 16-24), and God (vv. 25-36).

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 possessing this righteousness remained for him to clarify. This practical guidance (12:1—15:13) is especially important, since the Christian is no longer under the regulations of the Mosaic Law (7:6; 10:4). What follows is New Covenant teaching.

## **VI. THE PRACTICE OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS 12:1—15:13**

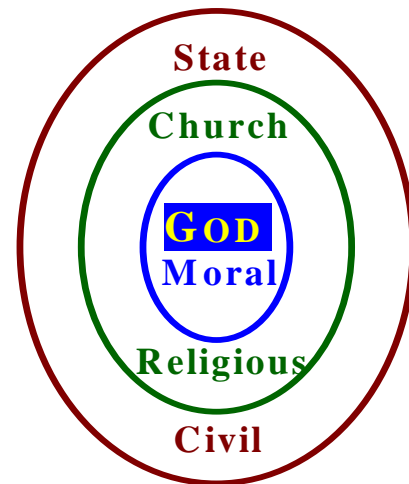
In contrasting chapters 1—11 with chapters 12—16 of Romans, perhaps the most important distinction is that the first part deals primarily with God's actions for humanity, and the last part deals with people's actions in response to God's. This is an oversimplification of the book, but the distinction 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. Eph. 4:1; 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."<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>437</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, p. 204.

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), but 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]."<sup>438</sup>

Chapters 12—13 give directions for Christian conduct generally, and 14:1—15:13 deals with a specific problem that the Roman Christians faced and which all Christians share.

#### **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 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 provided freely (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 and 19 is in view.

Exhortation now replaces instruction. Urging (Gr. *parakaleo*) lies between commanding and beseeching. It ["I urge you"] is "one of the tenderest

<sup>438</sup>Moo, p. 745.

expressions in all the Bible."<sup>439</sup> Paul used *parakaleo* about 50 times in his epistles. Probably he 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 in response to 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, 19).

". . . 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!"<sup>440</sup>

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 describes 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.

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).<sup>441</sup> 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.<sup>442</sup> 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 to be given over to the Lord (cf. Lev. 1). We need to separate 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.<sup>443</sup> Others say that the aorist tense does not carry the once-for-all meaning, and that Paul

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<sup>439</sup>J. P. McBeth, *Exegetical and Practical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 229.

<sup>440</sup>Newell, p. 447. Cf. Phile. 9-10; 2 Cor. 5:20.

<sup>441</sup>Cranfield, 2:598-99; Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 324.

<sup>442</sup>Liddon, p. 228; D. Edmond Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation: An Exposition of Romans 12:1-2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):314.

<sup>443</sup>E.g., Harrison, p. 127.

simply meant that we should make this offering—without implying how often.<sup>444</sup> 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 his or her 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.

"The sacrifices of the new order do not consist in taking the lives of others, like the ancient animal sacrifices, but in giving one's own (*cf.* Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:5)."<sup>445</sup>

"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). Both individuals allowed themselves to be bound and offered up as sacrifices.

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."<sup>446</sup>

Both activities are important. The present tense in the Greek text of verse 2 indicates a 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."<sup>447</sup> 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.

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<sup>444</sup>E.g., Moo, p. 750.

<sup>445</sup>Bruce, p. 213.

<sup>446</sup>Hiebert, "Presentation and . . .," p. 312.

<sup>447</sup>J. B. Phillips' paraphrase.

"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."<sup>448</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the unidentified "transformer" whom Paul set in contrast to the world (8:9-11; cf. Matt. 17:1-2; 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; Jas. 1:6-8). However, it is always good. 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. The 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. 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 already received 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 *does* make. It is possible to be a Christian without ever making this commitment, since it is voluntary.

"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)."<sup>449</sup>

### **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).

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<sup>448</sup>Moo, p. 757.

<sup>449</sup>Livingston Blauvelt Jr., "Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:569 (January-March 1986):38.

### **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" themselves than they should, but use "sober (sound) judgment" in evaluating themselves.

"Humility is the direct effect of consecration, because pride is, and ever has been, the great enemy of true righteousness."<sup>450</sup>

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. The "measure of faith," therefore, does not refer to how much faith one can muster up, but to the amount of faith that God has given each Christian. This amount varies from believer to believer. We can see this evidenced, in that it is easier for some Christians to trust God than it is for others to do so. 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 we are part of a larger organism ("body"). We are not just a loose collection of individuals ("members") 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 ("one body"), and its members are diverse, personally and in their functions ("members do not have the same function").

"Your right hand has never yet had a fight with the left: on the contrary, each constantly helps the other!"<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>450</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 331.

<sup>451</sup>Newell, pp. 460-61.

All the members belong to each other ("individually members of one another"); there is mutuality in the church. As members of each other, we cannot work independently effectively. Each member profits (benefits) from the contribution of every other member, as well. This realization should help us to avoid becoming proud.

"The point is that each member functions to serve the body, not the body to serve the members."<sup>452</sup>

12:6 The "gifts" that we have are abilities that God has given us by His "grace" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:6; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). They are capacities for His service.<sup>453</sup>

"Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with."<sup>454</sup>

The list of seven gifts 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 ("*exercise them accordingly*"). All the gifts, in order to be effective, must be used "according to the proportion" (Gr. *analogia*) of the "faith" that God has given each of 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 to exhort, encourage, and comfort (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3, 31) and, perhaps, praising God (1 Chron. 25:1), rather than predicting or proclaiming new revelation. All the other gifts listed here have served the whole church throughout its history, so probably Paul viewed prophecy this way, too. If so, none of the seven gifts listed here are "sign gifts."

12:7-8 All the gifts Paul mentioned in verses 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. For each gift listed, he was speaking 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.<sup>455</sup> "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

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<sup>452</sup>Witmer, p. 488.

<sup>453</sup>For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, "Confusing Word and Concept in 'Spiritual Gifts': Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 200):37-51.

<sup>454</sup>Wiersbe, 1:555.

<sup>455</sup>Cranfield, 2:622.

included communicating any word from God, inspired or uninspired (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).<sup>456</sup>

"Exhorts" or "encouraging" translates the Greek word *parakalesis* (cf. v. 1), sometimes rendered "comfort." All three words are good translations. The context provides the clue, to the main idea, wherever the word appears. Here, "exhortation" is perhaps the best. Whereas teaching appeals to the mind, exhortation (preaching) appeals to the will. "Giving" is capable of broad application within the body. We should practice giving with singleness of heart, namely, freedom from mixed motives (cf. Acts 5:1-11). The idea is not, so much, giving lavishly, as giving single-mindedly: to please the Lord.

"Leaders" experience the temptation to simply enjoy the benefits of their position instead of providing true leadership by serving. "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. Note this passage's similarity with Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7).

"From the thought of humility the idea of love naturally follows, for humility will necessarily express itself in affection for those around."<sup>457</sup>

### **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."<sup>458</sup>

12:9 "Love" is of primary importance (cf. Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; 1 Cor. 13). However, it must be sincere ("without hypocrisy"; cf. 1 John 4:19-21). This command acts as a heading for this whole list of exhortations.

<sup>456</sup>See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

<sup>457</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 337.

<sup>458</sup>Mounce, p. 236.



"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."<sup>459</sup>

The totally committed Christian should hate ("abhor") "evil" and love ("cling to") "what is good," as his or her 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."<sup>460</sup>

- 12:10 We need to express love to individual people as well as to ideals (v. 9). "Giving" recognition and appreciation ("preference . . . in honor") to those who deserve it is a concrete way of expressing love. "Devoted" (Gr. *philostorgoi*) suggests family affection (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2).
- 12:11 It is natural for Christians to slack off in their "diligence" in "serving the Lord," when they have been Christians for some time. Apollos was a model of someone who maintained "fervent" diligence in his service (Acts 18:24-25; cf. Rev. 3:15-16), as was Paul.
- 12:12 We must never lose sight of our "hope" of future rewards and comforts that God has promised us. This will help us to 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. We should not just pray, we should be "devoted to prayer" (cf. Acts 1:14).<sup>461</sup> It should have high priority in our lives. Frequent attendance at prayer meetings is one indication of devotion to prayer.
- 12:13 We should never be so self-centered that we fail to reach out to others ("practicing hospitality"). Again, God the Father and God the Son are our great examples here.

". . . one is not just to wait and take the stranger in, if he actually presents himself at the door, but to go out and look for those to whom one can show hospitality . . ."<sup>462</sup>

### 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, i.e., to chase after or hunt down. To "bless" involves both wishing God's best on people and praying for them.

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<sup>459</sup>Moo, p. 774.

<sup>460</sup>Mounce, p. 237.

<sup>461</sup>See Dan R. Crawford, compiler, *Giving Ourselves to Prayer*.

<sup>462</sup>Cranfield, 2:639-40.

"The principle of nonretaliation for personal injury permeates the entire New Testament."<sup>463</sup>

- 12:15 Believers should share the joys ("rejoice with those who rejoice") and sorrows ("weep with those who weep") of their neighbors, especially fellow believers (1 Cor. 12:26; Phil. 4:14).
- 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: "do not be haughty . . . associate with the lowly."
- 12:17 The second exhortation probably means we should give thought to *how* we do "what is right," so that 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 "peace"-maker (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 (cf. Gal. 2:11). In any case, the believer should not be the instigator of trouble under normal circumstances. Note Paul's two qualifiers regarding living at peace in this verse.
- 12:19 If hostility does erupt, the Christian should not retaliate ("not take . . . revenge"). Rather, he or she should trust God to right the wrong: "leave room for the wrath" (cf. 1 Sam. 24—26). Long ago God promised to take care of His people when others wronged them (Deut. 32:35). We have a responsibility to defend the weak and to pursue justice, but we should not retaliate, but trust God, when others attack us personally (cf. David).
- 12:20 Instead of showing one's "enemy" unkindness, the believer should do him or her positive good (cf. Matt. 5:44). This may result in the antagonist feeling ashamed, acknowledging his error, and even turning to God in repentance.

One interpretation of "heap(ing) burning coals on his head" is that it figuratively describes doing good that results in the conviction and shame of the enemy. The expression supposedly 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 in a pan, typically 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.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup>Mounce, p. 239.

<sup>464</sup>Cf. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 347.

A better interpretation, I think, takes the "burning coals" as a figure of God's judgment that will come on the enemy if he persists in his antagonism. The figure of "coals of fire" in the Old Testament consistently refers to God's anger and judgment (cf. 2 Sam. 22:9, 13; Ps. 11:6; 18:13; 140:9-10; Prov. 25:21-22). Thus the meaning appears to be that the Christian can return good for evil with the assurance that God will eventually punish his or her enemy.<sup>465</sup>

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 ("overcome evil with good"). The best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him or her into a friend.<sup>466</sup>

There is a progression in 12:9-21. Paul moved 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 in the church as well as in the world.

The general nature of the commands in this pericope illustrates the essentially gracious character of the New Covenant's "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 those in all the New Testament, are much more general, and are more like principles. This is one reason the New Testament writers said 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 (cf. Mark 12:17; John 18:33-38; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Paul here 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

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<sup>465</sup>See John N. Day, "'Coals of Fire' in Romans 12:19-20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (October-December 2003):414-20; John Piper, *"Love Your Enemies": Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis*, p. 115; and Krister Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliatio, and Love: 1 QS x, 17-20 and Rom. 12:19-20," *Harvard Theological Review* 55(1962):352. See Witmer, p. 490, for a third view.

<sup>466</sup>Bruce, p. 218.

clarify Christians' duties to our earthly rulers, as well as our duty to our heavenly Ruler.<sup>467</sup>

### **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 (cf. Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26; 1 Pet. 2:13-14).

"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)."<sup>468</sup>

13:1        When Paul wrote "every person" (Gr. *psyche*), he probably had every *Christian* person in mind, since he was writing to Christians. Nevertheless what he taught about his readers' conduct toward their civil government also applies to the unsaved. He was not legislating Christian behavior for unbelievers, but when unbelievers behave this way, the best responses for them prevail.

"Subjection," or submission, involves placing oneself under the authority of another, and doing or not doing 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 and deference that is not necessarily present in obedience. Submission is essentially support. The Christian might 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

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<sup>467</sup>See 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; or idem, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That . . .*, pp. 11-22.

<sup>468</sup>Moo, p. 792.

God commands to be submissive or supportive (Eph. 5:22). Male and female children, citizens, and church members also need to demonstrate a submissive spirit.

- 13:2 Refusal to submit to (or opposing) one's government is tantamount to refusing to submit to God. Those who "resist" God's ordained authority can expect to suffer ("receive") "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]."<sup>469</sup>

- 13:3 There are two possible ways to explain this verse, which, on the surface, seems very naïve. Each of these interpretations will have very different results for those who hold them. The problem, of course, is that "rulers" sometimes are, perhaps often, "a cause of fear" for those who do right. Government authorities sometimes abuse their powers for selfish ends. If they do not abuse, but serve the welfare of the people as they should, we have no reason to fear them and can submit to them fairly easily. But 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 at least speak out against such abuses. 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 reassuring truth expressed in 8:28. The Christian who takes this view would not participate in a revolution, although 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.

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<sup>469</sup>Wiersbe, 1:557. See Newell, pp. 497-98, for a brief excursus on capital punishment.

I tend to prefer the second option, mainly because I would be uncomfortable to assume that Paul meant something he did not state. I prefer to accept what he said at face value. In this case the rulers would not be a cause of fear for the Christian either way, whether the rulers were just or unjust. The Christian would be obedient to God by submitting in either case. The objection to 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 ("praise") 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 itself may not issue a certificate of commendation to the faithful Christian, but his or her submissive conduct can still result in his "praise." Even if no other human being ever learned of a martyr's conduct, God would still know about it, and *He* would "praise" him or her.

13:4 God will use government, whether good or bad, to bring the submissive Christian what is "good" from His perspective (cf. 8:28). Christians who are not submissive should fear ("be afraid"), because government has received its power ("sword") to punish evildoers "from (of) God."

13:5 There are two reasons a Christian needs to be submissive ("in subjection") to his government: One is that the government may punish him ("wrath") if he is not submissive. The other is that God may punish him ("conscience' sake"). God's punishment may be during the Christian's lifetime, or after that, at the judgment seat of Christ. In the latter 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.<sup>470</sup>

"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."<sup>471</sup>

13:6 This double duty—to government and to 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

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<sup>470</sup>Moo, p. 803.

<sup>471</sup>Wiersbe, 1:557.

servants (Luke 10:7). Individual rulers may be unworthy, but the institution is not. Governments cannot function without revenue. This is the third time Paul referred to government (twice in v. 4).

13:7 Paul, as Jesus, commanded believers to "render" or give back (Gr. *apodote*) to the government what they owe for services it provides (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 ("custom" taxes) to a foreign ruler, and revenue or income "taxes" (as to 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). In the Great Tribulation, believers must not give allegiance to the Beast who will rule over the whole earth, but remain loyal to Christ. I believe that 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).<sup>472</sup>

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 options exist to change the law—short of breaking the law. I believe that those who choose to break the law simply to make a statement, even though they are willing to suffer the consequences (e.g., go to jail), violate New Testament teaching on this subject.

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<sup>472</sup>See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Christian and Civil Disobedience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:506 (April-June 1970):153-62; and Denny Burk, "Is Paul's Gospel Counterimperial? Evaluating the Prospects of the 'Fresh Perspective' for Evangelical Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:2 (June 2008):309-37.

## **2. Conduct toward unbelievers 13:8-10**

Paul had previously glorified the importance of love among believers (12:9-10; cf. 1 Cor. 13). 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 ("give"; "do not turn away from") those who "want(s) 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.

"Christians are to leave no debts, no obligations to their fellowmen, undischarged."<sup>473</sup>

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 ("to love one another"): 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, however, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, who produces "love" within us as a fruit of His life (Gal. 5:22-23).

"This is not a prohibition against a proper use of credit; it is an underscoring of a Christian's obligation to express divine love in all interpersonal relationships."<sup>474</sup>

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 comparatively few. The simple principle is enough: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is another 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.

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<sup>473</sup>Cranfield, 2:673.

<sup>474</sup>Witmer, "Romans," p. 491.



"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)."<sup>475</sup>

"What is commanded is that we are to have the same loving regard for others that we have instinctively for ourselves."<sup>476</sup>

### **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 get ready to meet the Lord, after which we must give an account of our stewardship to Him (cf. 14:10; 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 ("asleep"), 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 ("the day is near"), 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 "lay(ing) aside" evil "deeds" ("of darkness") as a garment, and putting on deeds of holiness ("armor of light"). 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."<sup>477</sup>

13:13 Our behavior, and especially 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

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<sup>475</sup>Moo, pp. 816-17.

<sup>476</sup>Mounce, p. 246.

<sup>477</sup>Moo, p. 822.

Corinth where Paul wrote this epistle. He observed them constantly. Intemperance often leads to "sexual" sin ("promiscuity and sensuality"), that frequently results in contention and quarreling.<sup>478</sup>

13:14 In one sense every believer "put(s) 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).<sup>479</sup> The first step in putting on the armor of light (v. 12) is committing ourselves to follow Jesus Christ wholeheartedly.

"A literary parallel to this use of 'put on' is quoted from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 11.5, where 'to put on Tarquin' means to play the part of Tarquin."<sup>480</sup>

However, dedicating is not the only thing that is necessary. There must also be a deliberate turning away from desires to indulge "(lusts of) 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 counseled 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**

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 for which God does not specify exactly what to 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.

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 differs from 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."<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>478</sup>See López, "A Study . . . Vice Lists."

<sup>479</sup>See Cranfield, 2:688-89.

<sup>480</sup>Bruce, p. 229.

<sup>481</sup>Stiffler, p. 222.

The command to "accept" one another (fellow believers) 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, the first group included Jewish Christians who, because of their background in Judaism, tended to perpetuate the practices commanded in the Mosaic Code. Some Jewish Christians do this today as well. In our day, this group also includes Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, who for one reason or another do not believe certain amoral (non-moral) practices are proper for a believer, even though other Christians consider them permissible.

An amoral practice is neither right nor wrong in itself. It does not involve sin, or, therefore, morality. Examples include food, drink, recreation, clothing, personal grooming, birth control, schooling, lifestyles, et al., when no sin is involved. Some Christians who have black-and-white mentalities have difficulty recognizing the existence of amoral activity; to them everything is either right or wrong. However, the Bible teaches that there are many activities that may be right but are unadvisable for any number of reasons. Also, there are actions that are right for some people but not right for others.

"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."<sup>482</sup>

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. Paul may have coined the designations "weak" and "strong," or these may have been terms with which his Roman readers were already familiar.

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<sup>482</sup>Moo, pp. 834-35.

"The weakness in faith to which this chapter refers is not weakness in basic Christian faith but weakness in assurance that one's faith permits one to do certain things . . ." <sup>483</sup>

In view of what Paul wrote about the "weak," they appear to have been mainly 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 developed 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 an overly sensitive conscience about doing things that are permissible for a Christian. A sensitive conscience is a good thing, but it can sometimes lead a person to restrict his or her freedom unnecessarily. Paul urged the stronger Christian, who appreciated the extent of his freedom, to accept his weaker brother as an equal. Nevertheless he was not to accept him *outwardly*, and then condemn him *inwardly* (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 from eating any food (1 Tim. 4:3-4). Eating food is an amoral matter. It is neither morally good nor morally bad; what we eat does not in itself affect our relationship with God. The contrast with life in Israel is again striking where, to please God, an Israelite had to abstain from certain foods. Under certain circumstances, eating a certain food could become a moral issue (cf. Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 11:20-21), but in itself food is non-moral.
- 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 ("regard with contempt"). 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 Lord is able to make him stand"). 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 one does not (v. 6). This is the opposite of the situation that Paul pictured in the previous illustration. Again, the *reason*

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<sup>483</sup>Cranfield, 2:700.

the weaker brother observes the day is immaterial. The point is that he "observes the day" (v. 6), and "regards one day above another." At the time Paul was writing, Sabbath and Jewish feast-day observances were matters of disagreement among Christians. The Jewish believers tended to observe these because they were part of their Jewish heritage, but 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 *whatever they do eat* (v. 2; cf. 1 Tim. 4:4-5).

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 that all of us should "live" to please "(for) the Lord." The context makes this clear (vv. 6, 8). Actually, 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 ("not one dies for himself"). Our whole existence: this side of the grave and the other, in life and in death ("whether we live or die"), 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 (continues to be) of primary importance. God controls the events leading to our death, as He does those governing our life.

14:9 Jesus Christ also lived, died, and lives again. Consequently, He is "Lord" of both those who have died ("the dead") and those who are still alive ("the living"). Paul's point was that He is the Judge, and we are not.

14:10 Both the critical weaker brother and the scolding stronger brother are guilty of the same offense, namely, judging prematurely and unwarrantedly. Jesus Christ (v. 9) is the God (v. 10) who will "judge" (cf. John 5:22, 27). This then is another reference to "the judgment seat (Gr. *bema*) of Christ [God]" (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15).<sup>484</sup>

"The remembrance that all Christians will have to stand before the judgment-seat of God is a powerful dissuasive from all sitting in judgment on one's fellows."<sup>485</sup>

<sup>484</sup>See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*.

<sup>485</sup>Cranfield, 2:709.

- 14:11 Everyone will "bow" in judgment before the Son of God (Isa. 45:23; 49:13; 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 (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).
- 14:12 In this summary statement, Paul identified the personal responsibility of every Christian to "give an 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."<sup>486</sup>

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 (cf. 12:1-2). The word "Lord" occurs seven times in verses 5-9.

## **2. The evil of offending one 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.<sup>487</sup>

- 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 ("in a brother's way"). It might set him back temporarily, or even do permanent damage to his sensitive conscience (cf. Matt. 18:6-7; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1-2).

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<sup>486</sup>Barclay, p. 205.

<sup>487</sup>Moo, p. 850.

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 (Gr. *adiaphora*, indifferent), matters.

"Here now is indeed a field for *judging!* and it is ourselves, not our brother, which we are to judge!"<sup>488</sup>

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 have still regarded the Jewish dietary laws as God's will for them (e.g. Seventh-Day Adventists and other sabbatarian groups). Is it any wonder that many Christians, even today, mistakenly think that the Mosaic Code constitutes their rule of life? Defilement springs from the mind, not material objects (cf. Matt. 12:34-35; 15:18-19; Titus 1:15).

14:15 The words "grieved" ("hurt") 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 what his conscience condemns, he commits sin and ultimately 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: temporarily, or even permanently! It would be terrible for a Christian to destroy someone whom our Lord has saved!

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 future millennial kingdom.

"The thought here fits a *future* Kingdom better than a present one. For surely in the present life no one can deny the importance of meat and drink; but so far as the Church is concerned in the future Kingdom, these things will be of no consequence. Therefore, since the Church is to reign in that Kingdom, its members should not judge or grieve one another in such matters here and now (cf. vss. 13-21)."<sup>489</sup>

<sup>488</sup>Newell, p. 510.

<sup>489</sup>Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 434.

"[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)."<sup>490</sup>

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 or "righteousness" (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 emphasizing 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 can recognize what is more and less important.

"Let us ask ourselves, Does *my* walk please God? Is it approved in the hearts of men?"<sup>491</sup>

- 14:19 The "things which 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 (1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Thess. 5:11). For the strong, this might mean foregoing some legitimate amoral practice. For the weak, it could mean 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."<sup>492</sup>

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 ("give offense") by eating it. This destroys the work that God is doing in building His church.

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<sup>490</sup>Sanday 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.

<sup>491</sup>Newell, pp. 513-14.

<sup>492</sup>Hunter, p. 121.



"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."<sup>493</sup>

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. People willingly alter their 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)."<sup>494</sup>

14:22 Paul evidently wrote this verse primarily with the strong in view (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.

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.<sup>495</sup> If a person does

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<sup>493</sup>Mounce, pp. 257-58.

<sup>494</sup>Moo, p. 881.

<sup>495</sup>See Cranfield, 2:729.

what he believes to be wrong ("eats" with "doubts"), 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. Perhaps "he who creates divisions" would be a better translation of *diakrinomenos* than "he who doubts."<sup>496</sup>

"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."<sup>497</sup>

"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."<sup>498</sup>

### **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. He cited the example of Christ, who lived free of taboos and unnecessary inhibitions, but was always careful to bear with the weaknesses of others.

- 15:1           The "strong" ought to take the initiative in resolving the tension between the strong and the weak ("bear the weaknesses"). 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. By "bear the weaknesses of those without strength," 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."<sup>499</sup>
- 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 ("good") and spiritual "edification" (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). We 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

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<sup>496</sup>David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of *Diakrino*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:8 (December 2005):733-55.

<sup>497</sup>Mounce, pp. 258-59. See also Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:13:20.

<sup>498</sup>H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 291.

<sup>499</sup>Revised English Bible.

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 of a commitment, to building up God's spiritual house, as David displayed in promoting His physical house.

"Convictions about what constitutes Christian conduct sometimes reflect ecclesiastical and social backgrounds, but the principles written in this passage are timeless. They may be stated as follows: Christians (1) are not to judge the practice of other Christians in respect to doubtful things (v. 3); (2) are personally accountable to God for their actions (v. 12); (3) are not to do anything that will put a stumbling block before their brethren (v. 13); (4) have Christian liberty regarding what they do (vv. 14, 20); (5) are to do what will edify their brethren (v. 19); (6) should, for the sake of their weaker brethren, voluntarily abstain from certain practices (v. 21); (7) are to do only what can be done without self-condemnation (v. 22); and (8) are to follow the example of Christ, who did not live to please Himself (15:1-3)."<sup>500</sup>

15:4 Paul used his reference to David's experience as an occasion to comment on the usefulness of all Old Testament Scripture ("whatever was written in earlier times").<sup>501</sup> It provides motivation for enduring ("perseverance"), 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 (cf. Heb. 11).

15:5 Endurance ("perseverance") and "encouragement" come to us through the Scriptures, but they are gifts from God ("who gives" them). Paul wished that all his readers, the strong and the weak, would appropriate these gifts and apply them in their interpersonal relationships.<sup>502</sup> The result would be unity in the church ("of the same mind with one another").

"The centripetal magnetism of the Lord can effectively counter the centrifugal force of individual judgment and opinion."<sup>503</sup>

<sup>500</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1228.

<sup>501</sup>See George W. Knight, III, "The Scriptures Were Written for Our Instruction," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (March 1996):3-13.

<sup>502</sup>See Cranfield, 2:736, for helpful comments on Paul's prayerful wishes.

<sup>503</sup>Harrison, p. 153.

15:6 United vocal praise of ("with one voice glorify[ing]") 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 difficulty 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)."<sup>504</sup>

#### **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.

15:7 "Accept" repeats Paul's opening exhortation (14:1). "One another" encompasses the two groups, the strong and the weak. It is inconsistent for a Christian to reject someone whom God has accepted. We are to receive ("accept") "one another as" Jesus "Christ" has received ("accepted") "us." We are fellow members of the family of God. Accepting one another glorifies God.

15:8 Verses 8-10 expand the idea of Jesus Christ accepting us. Verse 8 deals with His acceptance of Jews ("the circumcision"). 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 occasionally 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 (have "mercy" on) the Gentiles. Therefore conservative Jewish believers should not despise their more liberal Gentile brethren. I use the adjectives "conservative" and "liberal" to describe their relationship to amoral (non-moral) matters. Four quotations from the Old Testament ("Writings," "Law," and "Prophets") follow, which 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 by themselves "praising" God, apart from participation with Israel (Ps. 117:1; Isa. 11:10). Perhaps Paul cited these references to help his Jewish readers remember that their

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<sup>504</sup>Wiersbe, 1:562.

Gentile brethren did not need to come to God through Jews or Judaism. They did not need to practice some of the things that Jewish Christians did as a part of their cultural heritage.

Some interpreters have concluded that verse 12 teaches that Christ is presently reigning over the nations as Messianic King. But the context makes clear that Paul was not claiming a present fulfillment of this prophecy. Fulfillment lies in the future: in the Millennium.

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 (filled "with all joy") because of what God has already done for them, and what He is still doing for them. We can also be peaceful (filled with all "peace") as we realize both 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 "power of" the omnipotent "Holy Spirit" who is at work in us (cf. ch. 8).

"The achievement of all God's purposes for the spiritual welfare of His children comes from the power given by the Spirit of God. What a fitting closing reminder to the apostle's discussion of Christian living."<sup>505</sup>

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 consistently righteous in doing all these things (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 pertained to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>505</sup>Witmer, "Romans," p. 496.

### **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 besides 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. 6:13). Goodness is necessary to apply truth to life, as is knowledge. This was primarily 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.'"<sup>506</sup>

15:15 The apostle gave his readers credit for some "knowledge" (v. 14) of what he had written in the foregoing chapters. Nevertheless they needed *reminding*, as do all of God's people. This is the closest Paul got to explaining his purpose for writing Romans in this epistle, but this purpose statement is obviously very general.

15:16 Paul had a special obligation to this primarily Gentile congregation (1:13), since God had sent him to "minister . . . to the Gentiles" primarily. As a believer-"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 ("sanctified") 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 ("reason for boasting") because Gentiles had come to Jesus Christ through his ministry. In any event, he gave all the credit for what had happened to Jesus "Christ," who had worked through His servant to bring the Gentiles to obey God "in word and deed." Obedience in this context involved coming to (putting their trust in) Christ (cf. 1:5; 16:26; Acts 17:30; 1 Pet. 1:2).

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<sup>506</sup>Mounce, p. 266.

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).<sup>507</sup> The "power of" 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, with much of former Yugoslavia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. There is no record in Acts of Paul having gone there, though he may have done so on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9) or during his 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.



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). He went to unreached people ("not where Christ was named") "to preach the gospel" (Matt. 28:19-20). He did not wait for them to come and inquire about it.

<sup>507</sup>See Ken L. Sarles, "An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):57-82.

15:21 Apparently Paul found encouragement to pursue his 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: "For this reason (i.e., that Paul had committed himself to reaching the unreached) I have often been prevented from coming to you."

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 ("no further place for me in these regions"). Consequently he believed that he could look to comparatively unreached fields farther to the west in what is now Europe (cf. 1:11-12): "whenever I go to Spain."

"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."<sup>508</sup>

15:25-26 The purpose of Paul's collection of money ("contribution") from the Macedonian and Achaean churches was to relieve the poverty ("for the poor") that existed among the Jewish Christians ("saints") "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 ("they are indebted to them"). He could say that the givers owed it, because the gospel—which they benefited from—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 ("when [as soon as] I have finished this"). The money given was "fruit," in that it was the product of gospel seed-sowing. Paul, as the "apostle to the Gentiles," evidently wanted the gift to serve as a token of the Gentile churches' love and gratitude to the Jerusalem church. Or, possibly, he wanted it to serve as a token of the "fruit" that God had produced among the Gentiles because of the Jerusalem church.<sup>509</sup>

15:29 The "blessing of 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 later arrive in Rome in chains (Acts 28:16).

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<sup>508</sup>Moo, p. 900. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Spain," by A. F. Walls.

<sup>509</sup>Cranfield, 2:775.



### **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 ("urge," "beseech") he did when appealing for them to dedicate themselves to God (12:1). He exhorted them on the basis of their relationship with "the (our) Lord Jesus Christ" and the "love" that the Holy "Spirit" inspires. Paul 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!"<sup>510</sup>

"A Christian's intercession is a means of sharing in the ministry of others."<sup>511</sup>

15:31 Paul identified two immediate prayer requests. One was safety from the opposition of hostile unbelieving Jews (cf. Acts 9:29-30), whom he called "those who are disobedient in Judea," along with the distrust of Jewish Christians. The other was that the Jewish Christians would receive the monetary gift of their Gentile brethren ("that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable"). 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 ("that I may come to you in joy") in God's "will" (1:10), and his refreshment in the fellowship of the Roman saints ("rest in your company").

15:33 Even though Paul's life was full of turmoil because of his ministry, he wished the "peace" that comes from God ("the God of peace") as a special portion for the Roman church ("be with you all").

"Far from being an afterthought that included only a few personal remarks, Romans 15:14-33 is key for understanding the Book of Romans and Paul's theology of missions. As such, it offers significant insights for a contemporary biblical theology of missions. The passage is a reminder, first, that all missionary efforts must be dependent on God and all results must be recognized as the work of God's grace. Second, the task of missions is a priestly privilege of presenting the nations to God. Third, missions must maintain a balance between the ultimate goal of establishing mature strategic congregations and not losing the urgency of evangelism among the unreached. Fourth, those who carry the gospel to the unreached among the nations are helping fulfill the purposes of God in

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<sup>510</sup>Wiersbe, 1:565.

<sup>511</sup>Witmer, p. 498.

salvation history. Fifth, reciprocal, mutual partnerships, so central to the task of missions, must emerge among churches around the world."<sup>512</sup>

### **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 36 persons in this chapter. Eight of these people were with Paul, and the rest were in Rome. He identified 27 men and seven women by name, plus two more by their relationship to someone else. 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). The households might also be house churches. 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.<sup>513</sup>

Several commentators have believed that chapter 16 was originally a separate letter that Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus. The hypothesis behind this view is that since Paul had not visited Rome he could not have known so many people, whom he greeted. He had ministered for three years in Ephesus and undoubtedly knew many people there. This view is highly improbable.<sup>514</sup>

"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!"<sup>515</sup>

". . . 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."<sup>516</sup>

". . . 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."<sup>517</sup>

#### **1. A commendation 16:1-2**

"Phoebe" (lit. "Bright" or "Radiant") was evidently the woman who carried this epistle from Corinth to Rome.

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<sup>512</sup>Steve Strauss, "Missions Theology in Romans 15:14-33," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (October-December 2003):474.

<sup>513</sup>See P. Lampe, "The Roman Christians in Romans 16," in *The Romans Debate*, pp. 227-29.

<sup>514</sup>See Bruce, pp. 253-57, for an effective rebuttal.

<sup>515</sup>Newell, p. 548.

<sup>516</sup>Moo, p. 917.

<sup>517</sup>Wiersbe, 1:565.

"The name itself was one of the names of the goddess, Diana, and this would suggest that she was a convert from heathenism, not a Jewess."<sup>518</sup>

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 deaconess<sup>519</sup> or whether she was simply an informal servant of the church. Paul stressed her service, not her office. The Greek word *prostatis*, "helper," occurs only here in the New Testament and probably means a helper in the sense of a benefactor or patron. She was his "sister . . . in the Lord," as seems clear from his reference 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, like 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 a more personal contact with the congregations that had not seen his face.

16:3-5a Paul had met "Prisca"—"Priscilla" is the diminutive form—and her husband "Aquila" in Corinth (Acts 18:2); they had "risked" their lives for Paul. 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 that time, and one met in theirs (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 only in the sense of being fellow Jews (cf. 9:13; Phil. 1:7; 4:14). "Fellow-prisoners" probably means voluntary servants committed to the Lord, since Paul was not in

<sup>518</sup>Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle . . .*, p. 417.

<sup>519</sup>Moo, p. 914; Bruce, p. 252; Mickelsen, p. 1225.

prison, nor had he been in prison, when he wrote this epistle (cf. Col. 4:10; Phile. 23). "Apostles" (v. 7) here must have the general meaning of *representatives* (traveling missionaries), rather than being a technical reference to one of the 13 official apostles (cf. Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; 1 Thess. 2:6; Phil. 2:25).

16:8-15 "Those . . . of the *household* of Aristobulus" (v. 10) were probably his slaves (household servants). Since Paul did not greet Aristobulus himself here, this man may have been an unbeliever. "Tryphena" (v. 12, "Dainty") and Tryphosa ("Delicate") may have been sisters. Both names derive from the verb *truphao*, meaning to live delicately or luxuriously (cf. James 5:5). "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 Paul's ("and mine"), only in the sense that she had at one time acted like 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!"<sup>520</sup>

"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 still is, a common affectionate greeting, expressing mutual love, forgiveness, and unity in Christ. Paul relayed the greetings of "all the churches" he represented.

Paul's acknowledgement of his co-workers (vv. 3, 9; cf. v. 7) shows that he was not a "lone ranger" minister. The significant number of women (nine) 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, and Paul appreciated them.

### **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. The brevity of Paul's warning argues against concluding that false teachers were at that time active in the church.

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<sup>520</sup>Newell, p. 554.

16:17-18 False teachers were a danger to all the churches. Paul urged his Roman readers to avoid them.<sup>521</sup>

"If Paul had one particular group [of false teachers] in mind, we cannot be at all certain which it was. But he may well have had more than one group in mind, or he may have been warning in a quite general way against a danger which he knew would always threaten the churches but could present itself in many different forms."<sup>522</sup>

16:19 Paul was confident that his readers could handle this threat, because they had a reputation ("report of your obedience") 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, under God's sovereignty. 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 frustrate Satan's work among them, soon, when they rejected the 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 signaled the end of a Pauline letter, but the apostle had more to communicate in this instance.<sup>523</sup>

#### **4. Greetings from Paul's companions 16:21-24**

The men Paul mentioned in verse 21 all seem to be fellow missionaries working with him in Corinth when he wrote this epistle. "Lucius" may have been Luke, the writer of Luke and Acts.<sup>524</sup> "Jason" (v. 21) may have been Paul's host in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:5-9). "Sospater" (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 Paul's amanuensis (copyist/secretary; scribe), who wrote down this epistle for him.

"A crucial and debated question is the degree of freedom that a letter writer might give to his or her scribe in the choice of wording. A reasonable conclusion is that the freedom given to an amanuensis would have differed depending on the skill of the amanuensis and the nature of

<sup>521</sup>See Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):205-7.

<sup>522</sup>Cranfield, 2:802.

<sup>523</sup>For a chart of Paul's benedictions in his epistles, see *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 500.

<sup>524</sup>See John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):38-41.

the relationship between the writer and the amanuensis. It may be, for instance, that when Paul used a close and trusted companion for his amanuensis, he gave that person some degree of freedom to choose the exact wording of the letter—always, we can assume, checking the letter over and attesting to its accurate representation of his thoughts with his closing greeting. Many scholars think that the influence of various amanuenses may explain the differences in Greek style among the Pauline letters, rendering it difficult, if not impossible, to draw conclusions about authorship based on such criteria."<sup>525</sup>

The men in verse 23 were evidently all Corinthian believers.

Erastus, the city treasurer "has been identified with the civic official of that name mentioned in a Latin inscription on a marble paving-block discovered at Corinth in 1929 by members of the American School at Athens: 'ERASTVS. PRO. AED. S. P. STRAVIT' ('Erastus, in return for his aedileship, laid this pavement at his own expense'). The aedile ('commissioner for public works') was a responsible magistrate in a Roman city. The office of *oikonomos*, perhaps 'clerk of works' rather than 'city treasurer', was a much humbler one (Lat. *arcarius*). Since the pavement seems to belong to a later part of the first century, it might be inferred that Erastus acquitted himself so satisfactorily in the inferior office that he was promoted to the higher magistracy, and showed his appreciation of the honour thus done him by presenting the city with a marble pavement. He need not be identified with the Erastus of Acts 19:22 or 2 Timothy 4:20; the name was common enough."<sup>526</sup>

### **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): "Him who is able to establish you." 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 ("preaching") followed "revelation" (Jesus presented and revealed to Israel, as the Messiah-Savior of the world). The "mystery" of the gospel had been hidden in eternity past until God revealed it, first in the Old Testament, partially, and then fully in the New (cf. 11:25; Gal. 1:12, 15-16; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26; 4:3).

16:26           Even though the Old Testament "prophets" revealed the gospel (good news), they did not always grasp all of its implications (1 Pet. 1:10-12; cf.

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<sup>525</sup>Carson and Moo, pp. 334-35.

<sup>526</sup>Bruce, p. 266.

Rom. 1:1-2). 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," not only because of who He is, but because of all 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.

## Appendix

<b>SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Reference</b>
	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
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 14:1-5
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



<b>SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES (CONT.)</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Reference</b>
49	<b>Writing of Galatians</b>	
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
50	Ministry in Derbe and Lystra	Acts 16:1a
50	Partnership with Timothy who joined Paul and Silas	Acts 16:1b-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	Cf. "we" in Acts 16:12 with "they" in Acts 17:1
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 18:5
51	<b>Writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians</b>	
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
52	Return to Syrian Antioch via Caesarea and Jerusalem	Acts 18:21-22
52-53	Layover in Syrian Antioch	Acts 18:23a

<b>SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES (CONT.)</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Reference</b>
53-57	Third missionary journey	Acts 18:23b—21:19
53	Ministry in Galatia	Acts 18:23b; 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	<b>Writing of 1 Corinthians</b>	
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; 12:17-19
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	<b>Writing of 2 Corinthians</b>	
56	Ministry in Macedonia	Acts 20:2
56	Ministry in Greece (Achaia and Corinth)	Acts 20:2-3
56-57	<b>Writing of Romans</b>	
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

<b>SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES (CONT.)</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Reference</b>
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—28:16
59	Trip to Crete	Acts 27:1-13
59	Shipwreck	Acts 27:14-44
59-60	Ministry on Malta	Acts 28:1-10
60	Trip from Malta to Rome	Acts 28:11-16
60-62	Ministry in Rome	Acts 28:16-31
60-62	<b>Writing of the Prison Epistles</b>	
62	Release from Rome	
62	Return to the Aegean area	
62-66	<b>Writing of 1 Timothy and Titus</b>	
67	Arrest	
67-68	Imprisonment in Rome	
67	<b>Writing of 2 Timothy</b>	
68	Martyrdom in Rome	

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