

Romans

Greeting and Introduction – 1:1-17

Part 1 of Greeting and Introduction – 1:1-7

1:1 Paul, a slave of the Messiah Jesus, called to be an apostle, individually separated for the good news of God,¹ **1:2** which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the sacred scriptures² **1:3** concerning His Son, who, in accordance with his flesh, came into existence out of the seed of David,³ **1:4** who, with power, in accordance with his spirit of being set apart, by virtue of his resurrection from the dead, was designated the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, our Lord,⁴ **1:5** through whom we received grace and apostleship for the obedience of belief for his name's sake among all the Gentiles,⁵ **1:6** among whom you also are the called of Jesus the Messiah,⁶ **1:7** to all those who are in Rome, the ones loved by God, called to be those set apart—grace to you and shalom from God our Father and the Lord Jesus the Messiah.⁷

Part 2 of Greeting and Introduction – 1:8-13

1:8 First, I thank my God in the light of Jesus the Messiah for all of you, because your belief is being proclaimed in the whole world.⁸ **1:9** For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the good news of His Son, is my witness how repeatedly I make mention of you,⁹ **1:10** always in my prayers requesting that somehow, at last, by the will of God, I may succeed in coming to you.¹⁰ **1:11** For I long to see you, so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, so that you may be established¹¹—**1:12** to the effect that we together are mutually encouraged through each other's belief—both yours and mine—while we are among one another.¹² **1:13** Thus, I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (although, so far, I have been prevented), so that I may have some fruit even among you, just as I also do among the rest of the Gentiles.¹³

Part 3 of Greeting and Introduction – 1:14-17

1:14 I am obligated to both the Greeks and the barbarians, and to both the intelligent and the unintelligent.¹⁴ **1:15** Thus, also, my eagerness to proclaim the good news to you who are in Rome.¹⁵ **1:16** For I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes—for the Jew *first* and *also* for the Greek.¹⁶ **1:17** For in it the justification of God is revealed by virtue of belief for the sake of belief, just as it has been written,

But the one who is justified by belief shall live <Habakkuk 2:4>.¹⁷

Main Discussion – 1:18-11:36

Part 1 of Main Discussion – 1:18-5:21

Section 1 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 1:18-3:20

Sub-section 1 of Section 1 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 1:18-32

1:18 For God's wrath is set to be revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth with their unrighteousness,¹⁸ **1:19** because what can be known about God is obvious among them, for God made it obvious to them.¹⁹ **1:20** For since the creation of the universe, His invisible qualities, both His eternal power and uncreated-God-ness, have been clearly perceived, because they are intellectually grasped through the things that are created.²⁰ Therefore, they are without any defense, **1:21** because, while they know about God, they neither ascribe worth to Him as God nor thank Him. Instead, they become worthlessly unintelligent in their reasonings, and their clueless heart is darkened.²¹ **1:22** While claiming to be wise, they become fools **1:23** and exchange the majesty of the

indestructible God for an image that is the representation of destructible man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.²²

1:24 Therefore, God hands them over in the cravings of their hearts to moral uncleanness, with the result that their bodies are dishonored among them,²³ **1:25** who exchange the truth about God for the lie and worship and serve the creation instead of the Creator, who is praiseworthy into the ages. Amen.²⁴

1:26 Consequently, God hands them over to shameful passions, because their women exchange natural relations for that which is contrary to nature.²⁵ **1:27** Likewise, men also, in the midst of rejecting the natural relations of the woman, are consumed by their evil desire for one another—men committing a shameful act with men and receiving in themselves the necessary penalty for their error.²⁶

1:28 And just as they do not regard as worthwhile to include God in their understanding, God hands them over to a defective mind to do things that are morally inappropriate,²⁷ **1:29** being filled with all unrighteousness, evil, impurity, and wickedness,²⁸ full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and wishing harm to others.²⁹ They become gossips, **1:30** slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, prideful, boasters, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³⁰ **1:31** void of understanding, agreement-breakers, without normal human affection, and unmerciful.³¹ **1:32** Although they fully understand the demands of God's justice, that those who do such things are worthy of death, they not only commit the same acts, but also join in approving of those who perform them.³²

Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 2:1-29

2:1 Therefore, you are without any defense, O man, everyone who judges, for when you judge another, you condemn yourself, because you who judge practice the very same things.³³

2:2 In addition, we know that the judgment of God towards those who do such things is according to truth.³⁴

2:3 However, do you reckon this, O man, who judges those who do such things and then commits the very same acts, that you will escape the judgment of God?³⁵ **2:4** Or do you have no regard for the riches of His kindness and patience and longsuffering, not realizing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?³⁶ **2:5** But in accord with your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revealing of the righteous judgment of God.³⁷

2:6 He will pay back each man according to his deeds³⁸—**2:7** on the one hand, eternal life to those who, in accordance with the perseverance of doing good, seek for glory, honor, and immortality,³⁹ **2:8** but, on the other hand, wrath and anger to those who, out of contentiousness, both disobey the truth and obey unrighteousness—⁴⁰ **2:9** affliction and anguish to every existing human being who does evil, to the Jew *first* and *also* to the Greek,⁴¹ **2:10** but glory, honor, and *shalom* to everyone who does good, to the Jew *first* and *also* to the Greek.⁴²

2:11 For there is no favoritism with God.⁴³ **2:12** Consequently, those who sin without the Covenant will indeed suffer destruction without the Covenant, and those who sin in the midst of the Covenant will also be judged through the Covenant.⁴⁴ **2:13** For it is not the hearers of the Covenant who are justified before God, but it is the doers of the Covenant who will be justified.⁴⁵

2:14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the Covenant by their nature, do the things of the Covenant, these, who do not possess the Covenant, are in fact a Covenant unto themselves,⁴⁶

2:15 who demonstrate the work of the Covenant written on their hearts, while their understanding bears witness to this and their thoughts alternately accuse or even defend them⁴⁷ **2:16** on the day when God judges the secrets of men—according to my gospel in view of the Messiah Jesus.⁴⁸

2:17 However, if you bear the name “Jew,” find security in the Covenant, boast in God,⁴⁹ **2:18** know what He commands us to do in our lives, and approve of what really counts, because you have been well taught from the Covenant,⁵⁰ **2:19** so that you are confident that you are a guide

to the blind, a light to those in darkness,⁵¹ 2:20 an instructor of fools, and a teacher of the immature, because you possess the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the Covenant...⁵²

2:21 Therefore, you who teach another, are you not teaching yourself? You who proclaim that we should not steal, are you stealing?⁵³ 2:22 You who say that we should not commit adultery, are you committing adultery? You who abhor idols, are you “robbing temples?”⁵⁴ 2:23 You who boast in the Covenant, are you dishonoring God through your violation of the Covenant?⁵⁵ 2:24 For it has been written,

The name of God is being treated disrespectfully among the Gentiles on account of you
<Isaiah 52:5>.⁵⁶

2:25 On the one hand, circumcision is valuable if you practice the Covenant. But if you are a transgressor of the Covenant, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.⁵⁷ 2:26 Therefore, if the uncircumcised man guards the requirements of the Covenant, will not his uncircumcision be considered as circumcision,⁵⁸ 2:27 and will not he who is by his very nature uncircumcised, because he keeps the Covenant, judge you, who, in spite of the letter of the Covenant and circumcision, are a transgressor of the Covenant?⁵⁹

2:28 For the Jew is not the one who is such outwardly, and neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh,⁶⁰ 2:29 but the Jew is one in his hidden, innermost parts. And circumcision is of the heart by means of the Spirit, not of the letter. In addition, his praise is not from men but from God.⁶¹

Sub-section 3 of Section 1 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 3:1-20

3:1 What then is the advantage of being a Jew, or what is the benefit of circumcision?⁶² 3:2 Great in every respect! Primarily, because they were entrusted with the messages of God.⁶³ 3:3 But what if some of them have not believed? Will their unbelief render null and void that which God entrusted to them?⁶⁴ 3:4 Absolutely not! Let God be someone who speaks truth, and let every man be someone who speaks lies, just as it was written,

So that You may be considered right when You speak and prevail when You judge <Psalm 51:4b>.⁶⁵

3:5 In addition, if our unrighteousness reveals God’s righteousness, what shall we say? God, who deals out wrath, is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in regard to what He does towards a man.)⁶⁶ 3:6 Absolutely not! Otherwise, how will God judge the world?⁶⁷ 3:7 If, by my lie, the truth of God is magnified to His glory, why am I still condemned as an evil-doer?⁶⁸ 3:8 In addition, it is not as we are slanderously accused of saying and as some declare that we say, “Let us do evil so that good may come.” Their condemnation is just.⁶⁹

3:9 So what are we saying? Do we have first position? Not at all. For we previously accused both Jews and Greeks—all of them—of being under sin,⁷⁰ 3:10 just as it has been written,

There is no one doing what is right <see Ps. 13:1 (LXX); Ps. 14:1 (Heb., Eng.)>,⁷¹

3:11 There is no one who understands;

No one who seeks after God <see Ps. 13:2 (LXX); Ps. 14:2 (Heb., Eng.)>.⁷²

3:12 All have turned away; together they have become worthless.

There is no one who does good, not even one.⁷³

3:13 Their throat is an open grave;

They deceive with their tongues;

The poison of snakes is behind their lips.⁷⁴

3:14 Their mouth is full of curses and bitter hatred.⁷⁵

3:15 Their feet are swift to shed blood.⁷⁶

3:16 Destruction and misery are in their paths.⁷⁷

3:17 Indeed, they do not know the route to shalom.⁷⁸

3:18 There is no fear of God before their eyes <vs. 12-18 – Ps. 13:3 (LXX)>.⁷⁹

3:19 And we know that whatever the Covenant says, it speaks to those who are enclosed within the Covenant, with the result that every mouth is silenced and the whole world is under the judgment of God.⁸⁰ 3:20 For this reason, no flesh will be justified before Him on the basis of works of the Covenant, because recognition of sin is what happens through the Covenant.⁸¹

Sub-section 4 of Section 1 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 3:21-30

3:21 However, now, independently of the Covenant, the justification of God has been manifested, to which the Law and the Prophets bear witness.⁸² 3:22 This is the justification from God through belief in Jesus the Messiah to all those who believe,⁸³ for there is no distinction.⁸⁴ 3:23 For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,⁸⁵ 3:24 so that they are justified as a gift by means of His grace in the light of the redemption by means of the Messiah Jesus,⁸⁶ 3:25 whom God purposed beforehand to be a propitiatory offering through belief in his blood, in order that he be the demonstration of His justification on account of His overlooking our formerly committed sins⁸⁷ 3:26 by means of God's restraint. This was for the demonstration of His justification, so that He may be both righteous and the justifier of the one who is justified by virtue of belief in Jesus.⁸⁸

3:27 Therefore, where is there any boasting? It has been excluded. Through what kind of teaching? Of works [of the Covenant]? No. Rather of belief.⁸⁹ 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by belief independently of works of the Covenant.⁹⁰ 3:29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not also the God of Gentiles?⁹¹ Yes, He is the God of Gentiles also, 3:30 if it is true that He is one. He will justify the circumcision by virtue of their belief and the uncircumcision in the light of their belief.⁹²

Section 2 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 3:31-4:25

3:31 Are we consequently invalidating the Covenant through our promotion of belief? Not at all! Rather, we are supporting the Covenant.⁹³ 4:1 For example, what shall we say that Abraham, our forefather by physical descent, has found?⁹⁴ 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by virtue of his works, then he has something to brag about. However, it turns out that he has nothing to brag about before God.⁹⁵ 4:3 Instead, what does the scripture say,

And Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as justification <Genesis 15:6>?⁹⁶

4:4 To him who performs deeds, his payment is not accounted to him according to grace, but according to what is owed.⁹⁷ 4:5 However, to him who does not perform deeds but, instead, *believes* in Him who justifies the ungodly person, his belief is accounted to him as justification.⁹⁸

4:6 This is also in exact accord with what David says of the blessing of the man to whom God accounts justification apart from works,⁹⁹

4:7 Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose evil actions are put out of sight.

4:8 Blessed is the man whose sin Yahweh does not take into account <Psalm 32:1,2>.¹⁰⁰

4:9 Therefore, was this blessing in response to circumcision or uncircumcision? Well, we are saying, "Belief was accounted to Abraham as justification."¹⁰¹ 4:10 Therefore, in what condition was it accounted—while he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision but in uncircumcision.¹⁰² 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision as that which confirmed the justification of belief which was in his uncircumcision, in order that he may be the father of all

who believe in the midst of uncircumcision, so that justification may also be accounted to them,¹⁰³ 4:12 and the father of circumcision for those not only who are by virtue of circumcision but also who follow in the footsteps of belief in the uncircumcision of our father Abraham.¹⁰⁴

4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be the heir of the world was not with a view to the Covenant but with a view to justification of belief.¹⁰⁵ 4:14 For if those who are of the Covenant are heirs, then belief has become irrelevant and the promise has been nullified.¹⁰⁶

4:15 For the Covenant produces wrath.¹⁰⁷ But where there is no Covenant, neither is there transgression.¹⁰⁸ 4:16 Therefore, it is by virtue of belief in order that it may be according to grace, so that the promise may be guaranteed to every one of the descendants, not to the one who is such by virtue of the Covenant only, but also to the one who is such by virtue of Abraham-like belief, who is the father of us all,¹⁰⁹ 4:17 just as it has been written,

I have established you as the father of many peoples <Genesis 17:5>.¹¹⁰

In the presence of Him whom he believed, that is God, who makes the dead alive and who calls into existence the things that do not exist,¹¹¹ 4:18 he, against hope, on the basis of hope, believed that he would become “the father of many peoples” in line with what had been said,

Thus shall your descendants be <Genesis 15:5>.¹¹²

4:19 And without weakening in his belief, he took notice of his own body, which had already died because he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.¹¹³ 4:20 Yet, he did not doubt the promise of God with unbelief. Instead, he was strengthened in belief while giving glory to God.¹¹⁴ 4:21 And being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also powerful enough to do, 4:22 it was therefore accounted to him as justification.¹¹⁵

4:23 Now, that it was accounted to him was not written with only him in view,¹¹⁶ 4:24 but also with us in view, to whom it would eventually be accounted, who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,¹¹⁷ 4:25 who was delivered up for our transgressions and was raised for our justification.¹¹⁸

Section 3 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 5:1-11

5:1 Therefore, having been justified by belief, we have a peaceful relationship with God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah,¹¹⁹ 5:2 because of whom through belief we have also received the right to enter into this grace in which we have come to stand.¹²⁰ And we boast in waiting confidently for the glory of God.¹²¹ 5:3 Not only this, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces perseverance,¹²² 5:4 and perseverance produces clear evidence, and clear evidence produces waiting confidently.¹²³ 5:5 And waiting confidently will not result in being ashamed, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts in the manner of the Holy Spirit who was given to us.¹²⁴

5:6 In addition, while we were still weak, at the right moment the Messiah died for the ungodly.¹²⁵ 5:7 For someone will hardly die for a righteous man. Though, perhaps for a good man someone may indeed have the courage to die.¹²⁶ 5:8 However, God demonstrates His own love towards us in that while we were nevertheless sinners, the Messiah died for us.¹²⁷ 5:9 Therefore, having now been justified by means of his blood, much more certainly we shall be saved from the wrath through him.¹²⁸ 5:10 For, if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more certainly, having been reconciled, we shall be saved into his life.¹²⁹

5:11 And not only this, but we also boast in God in view of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, by means of whom we have now received reconciliation.¹³⁰

Section 4 of Part 1 of Main Discussion – 5:12-21

5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death entered through sin, and thus death spread to all men, in regard to which all sinned...¹³¹

(**5:13** It turns out that, before the Covenant came along, sin was in the world, even though sin is definitely not “charged to one’s account” where there is no Covenant.¹³² **5:14** Nevertheless, death reigned supreme from Adam until Moses, even over those who did not sin like the transgression of Adam, who is the prototype of what was to come.¹³³)

5:15 However, the gracious gift is not like the transgression. For if many died because of the transgression of the one man, much more certainly did the grace of God and the free gift by means of the grace of the one man, Jesus the Messiah, prove to be abundant with respect to many.¹³⁴

5:16 In addition, the free gift is not like that which happened through the one who sinned. On the one hand, there is judgment by virtue of one transgression that leads to condemnation. On the other hand, there is the gracious gift that arises out of many transgressions that would lead to a just penalty.¹³⁵ **5:17** Thus, if death reigned supreme because of one man, because of the transgression of the one man, much more certainly those who receive grace and the free gift of justification that are in excess of the expected amount shall reign supreme in life because of the one man, Jesus the Messiah.¹³⁶

5:18 Therefore, just as because of one transgression there resulted condemnation for all men, thus, also, in connection with one just penalty there is justification leading to life for all men.¹³⁷ **5:19** For just as through the disobedience of one man, the many were made to be sinners, thus also through the obedience of one man, the many will be made to be justified.¹³⁸

5:20 And the Covenant came in with the express purpose that sin increase. However, where sin increased, grace was present even more abundantly,¹³⁹ **5:21** so that, just as sin reigned supreme by means of death, thus also grace would reign supreme through justification for the purpose of eternal life through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.¹⁴⁰

Part 2 of Main Discussion – 6:1-11:36

Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 6:1-8:39

Sub-section 1 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 6:1-14

6:1 Therefore, what shall we say, “Let us continue to do evil in order that grace will increase?”¹⁴¹ **6:2** Absolutely not! We who died to sin—how shall we still live in it?¹⁴² **6:3** Or do you not know that, as many of us as were baptized into the Messiah Jesus, we were baptized into his death?¹⁴³ **6:4** Therefore, through our baptism into his death, we were buried with him, so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead in view of the glory of the Father, thus also we may walk in the newness of life.¹⁴⁴ **6:5** For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, then we shall also certainly be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection,¹⁴⁵ **6:6** because we understand this—that our old self was crucified with him, so that our body of sin could be nullified, so that we are no longer enslaved to sin.¹⁴⁶ **6:7** For he who died has been justified with respect to sin.¹⁴⁷

6:8 And if we died with the Messiah, we believe that we shall also live with him,¹⁴⁸ **6:9** knowing that the Messiah, because he has been raised from the dead, no longer is subject to death. Death no longer dominates him,¹⁴⁹ **6:10** because the death that he died, he died for sin once and never again, and the life that he lives, he lives for God.¹⁵⁰ **6:11** In a similar manner, count yourselves on the one hand to be dead to sin, and on the other hand living for God in the Messiah Jesus.¹⁵¹

6:12 Therefore, do not let sin reign supreme in your mortal body so that you obey its strong desires.¹⁵² **6:13** And do not go on presenting your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. Instead, present yourselves to God as living from the dead and your members to God as instruments of morality,¹⁵³ **6:14** because sin will not dominate you. For you are not under the Covenant but under grace.¹⁵⁴

Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 6:15-8:39

Sub-sub-section 1 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 6:15-23

6:15 What does this mean? Shall we sin because we are not under the Covenant but under grace? Absolutely not!¹⁵⁵ **6:16** Do you not know that to whomever you keep on presenting yourselves as slaves in order to obey him, you are slaves toward whom you keep on obeying? You are either a slave of sin that leads to death, or of obedience that leads to righteousness.¹⁵⁶

6:17 Now thanks be to God that you were slaves of sin, but you obeyed from the heart the content of the teaching to which you were entrusted.¹⁵⁷ **6:18** And having been freed from sin, you were enslaved to righteousness.¹⁵⁸ **6:19** I am speaking in terms of your human experience

because of the moral weakness of your flesh—for just as you presented your members as slaves to moral filth and to lawlessness for the purpose of lawlessness, in the same manner now, present your members as slaves to righteousness for the purpose of being set apart.¹⁵⁹

6:20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free with respect to righteousness.¹⁶⁰ **6:21** Therefore, what benefit were you deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed, because the end result of those things is death?¹⁶¹ **6:22** However, now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit for the purpose of being set apart, and the end result is eternal life.¹⁶² **6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in the Messiah Jesus our Lord.¹⁶³

Sub-sub-section 2 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 7:1-6

7:1 Or do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to those who are familiar with the Covenant, that the Covenant has jurisdiction over a man as long as he is alive.¹⁶⁴ **7:2** For example, a married woman has been bound by the Covenant to her living husband. But if her husband dies, she is released from the husband commandment.¹⁶⁵ **7:3** Therefore, while her husband is alive, she shall be called an adulteress if she marries another man. However, if her husband dies, she is free from the husband commandment, so that she is not an adulteress when she marries another man.¹⁶⁶

7:4 Similarly, my brothers, you also were made to “die” by the Covenant in view of the body of the Messiah, so that you may “marry another man,” him who was raised from the dead, so that we may bear fruit for God.¹⁶⁷ **7:5** When we were in the fleshly natural-born sinfulness of our humanity, the sinful passions that existed in conjunction with the Covenant were themselves working in our members, so that we bore fruit that would mean death.¹⁶⁸ **7:6** But, now, we have been released from the Covenant, because we “died” in the midst of that by which we were being held fast, so that we serve as slaves in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.¹⁶⁹

Sub-sub-section 3 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 7:7-12

7:7 Therefore, what shall we say? Is the Covenant sin? Absolutely not! Instead, I did not really understand my sin except through the Covenant, because I did not understand my sinful desires except the Covenant was saying,

You shall not desire something rebelliously <Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21>.¹⁷⁰

7:8 And sin, taking the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of rebellious desires.

Apart from the Covenant, sin is dead.¹⁷¹ **7:9** And I was formerly “alive” apart from the Covenant. But when the commandment hit home, sin sprang to life,¹⁷² **7:10** and I died. Thus, this commandment, whose purpose was for life, turned out for me to be for the purpose of death.¹⁷³

7:11 For sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and then, in view of it,

killed me.¹⁷⁴ **7:12** Therefore, the Covenant is holy, and the commandment is holy and moral and good.¹⁷⁵

Sub-sub-section 4 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 7:13-23

7:13 Along this same line, did that which is good become death for me? Absolutely not! Instead, it was sin, so that sin could be brought to light by producing death for me through that which is good, so that sin could become sinful to the utmost degree through the commandment.¹⁷⁶

7:14 For we know that the Covenant is spiritual, but I am of fleshly natural-born humanity, having been sold into slavery to sin.¹⁷⁷ **7:15** Thus, on the one hand, I do not understand what I am doing, because I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate.¹⁷⁸ **7:16** But if I am doing this very thing I do not want, I am agreeing with the Covenant, that it is good.¹⁷⁹

7:17 Nevertheless, no longer am “I” the one doing what I am doing, but it is sin that dwells in me.¹⁸⁰ **7:18** Thus, I recognize that goodness does not dwell within me, that is in my natural-born humanity, for the desiring is present in me, but the doing of good is not.¹⁸¹ **7:19** Instead, I am not doing good, which I want, but I am practicing evil, the very thing I do not want.¹⁸² **7:20** But if I am doing this very thing which I do not want, no longer am “I” the one doing it, but it is sin that dwells in me.¹⁸³

7:21 In this way, I discover the principle in me who wants to do good—that evil is present within me.¹⁸⁴ **7:22** For I joyfully concur with the Covenant of God in my inner man,¹⁸⁵ **7:23** but I see another set of instructions in my members, which is warring against the instructions in my mind and making me a prisoner of the instructions of sin that are in my members.¹⁸⁶

Sub-sub-section 5 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 7:24-8:11

7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this deadly body?¹⁸⁷ **7:25** Thanks be to God in the light of Jesus the Messiah our Lord! Therefore, as a result, on the one hand, with my mind I am a slave to the instruction of God, but, on the other hand, with my natural-born humanity a slave to the instruction of sin.¹⁸⁸

8:1 The result is that there is now no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah Jesus,¹⁸⁹ **8:2** because the principle of the Spirit, which results in life, has set you free in the Messiah Jesus from the principle of sin and its result—death.¹⁹⁰ **8:3** What was impossible for Covenant to do, because it was too weak in view of our natural-born humanity, God did, while sending His own Son in the likeness of a sinful human being and concerning sin. He then exacted the penalty of sin on his humanity,¹⁹¹ **8:4** in order that the just requirement of the Covenant may be fulfilled for us, who do not live according to our natural-born humanity but according to the Spirit.¹⁹²

8:5 Indeed, those who are defined by their natural-born humanity are inwardly inclined toward the things of their natural-born humanity, and those who are defined by the Spirit are inwardly inclined toward the things of the Spirit.¹⁹³ **8:6** In addition, the intentions of the natural-born humanity are death-resulting, but the intentions of the Spirit are life-resulting and shalom-resulting,¹⁹⁴ **8:7** because the intentions of the natural-born humanity are hostile towards God, for they do not submit themselves to the instruction of God, because they are indeed incapable of doing so.¹⁹⁵ **8:8** Thus, those who are defined by their natural-born humanity are completely incapable of pleasing God.¹⁹⁶

8:9 However, you are not defined by your natural-born humanity but by the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Nevertheless, if someone does not have the spirit of the Messiah, he is not of Him.¹⁹⁷ **8:10** But if the Messiah is in you, on the one hand your body is dead on account of sin, and on the other hand your spirit means life on account of justification.¹⁹⁸ **8:11** Indeed, if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised the Messiah from the dead will through His Spirit who indwells you also make alive your bodies which are subject to death.¹⁹⁹

Sub-sub-section 6 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 8:12-14

8:12 Therefore then, brethren, we are obligated, not to our natural-born humanity to live according to our natural-born humanity.²⁰⁰ **8:13** If you are living according to your natural-born humanity, you are headed towards death. But if, by the Spirit, you are putting to death the actions that arise out of your physical existence, you will get yourself life.²⁰¹ **8:14** For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.²⁰²

Sub-sub-section 7 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 8:15-27

8:15 For You did not receive the spirit of slavery again with the result of your being afraid, but you received the spirit of adoption, by which we continuously cry out, “Father, Father.”²⁰³ **8:16** The Spirit himself confirms with our spirit that we are children of God.²⁰⁴ **8:17** And if we are children, then we are heirs also—on the one hand, heirs of God, and, on the other hand, fellow-heirs of the Messiah—if indeed we sympathetically suffer with him in order that we also be glorified with him.²⁰⁵ **8:18** For I regard it to be true that the sympathetic sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the future glory that will be revealed to us.²⁰⁶

8:19 Thus, the eager longing of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God.²⁰⁷ **8:20** The creation was forced to be subject to futility—not voluntarily, but on account of Him who forced it to be subject—on the basis of hope,²⁰⁸ **8:21** because the creation itself will also be set free from its slavery to decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²⁰⁹ **8:22** Indeed, we know that the whole creation groans with them and suffers with them the pains of childbirth until now.²¹⁰

8:23 And not only this, but we also, because we have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, while we eagerly await our adoption, being released from our body.²¹¹ **8:24** We were saved on the basis of hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who waits expectantly for what he sees?²¹² **8:25** However, if we hope for what we do not see, we are eagerly awaiting it with patient endurance.²¹³

8:26 And likewise, the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what is necessary to pray, but the Spirit Himself pleads for us in the manner of our wordless groanings.²¹⁴ **8:27** And He who carefully examines the hearts knows what is the intent of the Spirit—that He pleads on behalf of those who are set apart in accordance with God.²¹⁵

Sub-sub-section 8 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 8:28-30

8:28 And we know for those who love God that everything works together for their good, for those who have been called according to His plan,²¹⁶ **8:29** because the ones whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren.²¹⁷ **8:30** And the ones whom He predestined, these He also calls, and the ones whom He calls, these He also justifies, and the ones whom He justifies, these He also glorifies.²¹⁸

Sub-sub-section 9 of Sub-section 2 of Section 1 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 8:31-39

8:31 What, therefore, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, then who can be against us,²¹⁹ **8:32** He who did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all? How will He not along with him also grace us all things?²²⁰ **8:33** Who will bring a charge against the chosen ones of God? God is the one who justifies.²²¹ **8:34** Who is the one who condemns? The Messiah Jesus is he who died and who, even more, was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who also appeals to God on our behalf.²²²

8:35 What will separate us from the love of the Messiah? Will affliction, or anguish, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or sword²²³—**8:36** just as it has been written,

Because of you we are being put to death all day long.

We are considered as sheep for slaughter <Psalm 44:22>?²²⁴

8:37 However, in all these things we are overwhelmingly victorious in view of him who loved us.²²⁵ **8:38** Consequently, I have become convinced that neither death, nor life, nor messengers, nor rulers, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers,²²⁶ **8:39** nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in the Messiah Jesus our Lord.²²⁷

Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 9:1-11:36

Sub-section 1 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 9:1-5

9:1 I am telling the truth in the Messiah. I am not lying, while my understanding bears witness with me by means of the Holy Spirit,²²⁸ **9:2** that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart,²²⁹ **9:3** because I wish that I myself were assigned to destruction away from the Messiah on behalf of my brothers, my fellow-countrymen according to the flesh,²³⁰ **9:4** who are Israelites, to whom belong the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of Torah, the worship, and the promises,²³¹ **9:5** whose are the fathers and from whom is the Messiah (that which is according to the flesh), the one who is over all things. May God be blessed into the ages! Amen!²³²

Sub-section 2 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 9:6-13

9:6 But by no means has the message of God failed, because, all those who are from Israel, these are not Israel.²³³ **9:7** Nor is it that all children are the “seed” of Abraham, but

in Isaac will your seed be named <Genesis 21:12>.²³⁴

9:8 That is, the children of the flesh, these are not children of God. But the children of the promise are considered as “seed.”²³⁵ **9:9** For this is the message of the promise,

At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son <Genesis 18:10,14>.²³⁶

9:10 And not only this, but Rebekah also, after she had sexual relations with one man, Isaac our father²³⁷—**9:11** for even though they neither were born yet nor had done anything good or bad, in order that God’s plan according to choice would continue,²³⁸ **9:12** not on the basis of actions but on the basis of Him who calls, it was said to her,

The older will be enslaved to the younger <Genesis 25:23>,²³⁹

9:13 just as it has been written,

I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau <Malachi 1:2,3>.²⁴⁰

Sub-section 3 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 9:14-18

9:14 What, therefore, shall we say? There is no injustice with God, is there? Absolutely not!²⁴¹ **9:15** For He says to Moses,

I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion <Exodus 33:19>.²⁴²

9:16 Therefore then, it does not belong to the one who wills, nor to the one who exerts himself, but it belongs to God who performs mercy.²⁴³ **9:17** For the scripture says to Pharaoh,

For this reason I raised you up, so that I could demonstrate My power by means of you and so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth <Exodus 9:16>.²⁴⁴

9:18 Therefore then, He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.²⁴⁵

Sub-section 4 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 9:19-29

9:19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still blame people for their evil, for who has ever resisted His will?”²⁴⁶ 9:20 On the contrary O man, who you are, the one who is defending himself against God? The thing which is molded will not say to the molder,

“Why did you make me like this,” will it <Isaiah 29:16>?²⁴⁷

9:21 Does not the potter of the clay have the right to make from the same lump one clay pot for honor and another clay pot for dishonor?²⁴⁸

9:22 If God, while desiring to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, has endured with great patience clay pots of wrath which were made for a destiny of destruction,²⁴⁹

9:23 then He has done so in order that He make known the riches of His glory on clay pots of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for a destiny of glory²⁵⁰—9:24 even us whom He called, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles.²⁵¹ 9:25 This is similar to what He says in Hosea,

I shall call those who are not My people “My people” and her who is not beloved “beloved,”²⁵² 9:26 and it shall be in the place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” there they shall be designated “sons of the living God” <Hosea 2:23;1:10>.²⁵³

9:27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel,

Even though the number of the sons of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved,²⁵⁴ 9:28 for soon Yahweh will execute His determined plan completely on the land <Isaiah 10:22,23>.²⁵⁵

9:29 And just as Isaiah foretold,

Unless Yahweh of battalions had left behind a ‘seed’ for us, we would have become as Sodom and we would be like Gomorrah <Isaiah 1:9>.²⁵⁶

Sub-section 5 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 9:30-10:3

9:30 Therefore, what shall we say? That the Gentiles, who were not looking for justification, laid hold of justification, and this is the justification which is by virtue of belief.²⁵⁷ 9:31 But Israel, while striving after the Covenant of justification, did not arrive the Covenant.²⁵⁸ 9:32 Why not? Because it was not by virtue of belief, but by virtue of works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,²⁵⁹ 9:33 just as it was written,

Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and an offensive rock, and he who believes in it will not become ashamed <Isaiah 8:14; 28:16>.²⁶⁰

10:1 Brothers, my heart’s desire and my appeal to God on their behalf is for their salvation.²⁶¹ 10:2 I attest that they have a zeal for God, but it is not according to a proper understanding.²⁶² 10:3 Because they do not really grasp the justification of God and seek to establish their own justification, they do not submit to the justification of God.²⁶³

Sub-section 6 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 10:4-13

10:4 For the goal of the Covenant is the Messiah with the result of justification for everyone who believes.²⁶⁴ 10:5 For Moses writes concerning justification that is by virtue of the Mosaic Covenant,

The man who practices the things shall live by means of them <Leviticus 18:5>.²⁶⁵

10:6 And justification by virtue of belief speaks in this manner,

Do not say in your heart <Deuteronomy 9:4>, “Who will ascend into heaven <Deuteronomy 30:12>?”

This is to bring the Messiah down.²⁶⁶ 10:7 Or,

“Who will descend into the abyss <similar to Deuteronomy 30:13>?”

This is to bring the Messiah up from the dead.²⁶⁷ 10:8 Rather, what does it say?

“The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart <Deuteronomy 30:14>.”

This is the message of belief, which we are proclaiming,²⁶⁸ 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and you believe because of your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.²⁶⁹ 10:10 With the heart a person believes with the result of justification, and with the mouth he confesses with the result of salvation.²⁷⁰ 10:11 For the scripture says,

Everyone who believes in it will not become ashamed <Isaiah 28:16>.²⁷¹

10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same person is Lord of all, because He is rich towards all who call upon Him.²⁷²

10:13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved <Joel 2:32>.²⁷³

Sub-section 7 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 10:14-21

10:14 Therefore, how may they call on Him whom they did not believe? And how may they believe what they have not heard? And how may they hear apart from someone’s making proclamation?²⁷⁴ 10:15 And how may they proclaim unless they are sent, just as it was written,

How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news of good things <paraphrase of Isaiah 52:7>!²⁷⁵

10:16 However, not everyone obeyed the good news. For Isaiah says,

Lord, who believed our message <Isaiah 53:1>?²⁷⁶

10:17 Therefore, belief is from hearing, and hearing is through the message of the Messiah.²⁷⁷

10:18 Nevertheless, I say, they did not hear, did they? On the contrary,

Their voice has gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the inhabited world <Psalm 19:4>.²⁷⁸

10:19 But I say, Israel did not know, did they? First, Moses says,

I will annoy you terribly by that which is not a nation. I will make you angry by a nation who do not understand <Deuteronomy 32:31>.²⁷⁹

10:20 And Isaiah is bold and says,

I was found by those who were not seeking me, and I became manifest to those who were not inquiring after me <Isaiah 65:1>.²⁸⁰

10:21 Yet, to Israel He says,

All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people <Isaiah 65:2>.²⁸¹

Sub-section 8 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 11:1-6

11:1 What I am asking is this—God has not rejected His people, has He? Absolutely not! For, indeed, I am an Israelite, from the “seed” of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.²⁸²

11:2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew <Psalm 94:14>.

Or do you not know what the scriptures say about Elijah as he pleads with God against Israel,²⁸³

11:3 Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life <1 Kings 19:10,14>.²⁸⁴

11:4 Yet, what is the divine response to him?

I have kept for Myself 7,000 men who have not bowed their knee to Baal <1 Kings 19:18>.²⁸⁵

11:5 In the same manner, therefore, at the present time, there exists a remnant according to His gracious choice.²⁸⁶ **11:6** And if it is by means of grace, it is not by virtue of works. Otherwise, grace is not grace.²⁸⁷

Sub-section 9 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 11:6-10

11:7 What then? That which Israel is seeking, they did not obtain this. However, the chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened,²⁸⁸ **11:8** just as it is written,

God gave them a spirit of dullness <Isaiah 29:10>, eyes to see not and ears to hear not down to this very day <Deuteronomy 29:4>.²⁸⁹

11:9 Even David says,

Let their table become a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, and a just recompense to them.²⁹⁰

11:10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and may their backs bend through everything <Psalm 69:22,23>.²⁹¹

Sub-section 10 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 11:11-24

11:11 In addition, I am asking this—they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? Absolutely not! But, through their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to annoy them

terribly.²⁹² **11:12** And if their transgression be wealth for the world and their failure be wealth for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness be!²⁹³

11:13 Thus, I say to you, Gentiles, as far as I am certainly the apostle to the Gentiles, I am glorifying my ministry,²⁹⁴ **11:14** if somehow I annoy terribly my kinsmen and save some of them.²⁹⁵ **11:15** For, if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from those who are dead.²⁹⁶ **11:16** And if the first portion is holy, the lump is also. And if the root is holy, the branches are too.²⁹⁷

11:17 If some of the branches were broken off, and you, being from a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them such that you became a partaker with them in the rich root of the olive tree,²⁹⁸ **11:18** do not be arrogant toward the branches. But if you are arrogant, you do not support the root, but the root supports you.²⁹⁹ **11:19** Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in."³⁰⁰ **11:20** That's right. They were broken off because of their unbelief, and you stand because of your belief. Do not be arrogant, but fear,³⁰¹ **11:21** because, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you.³⁰²

11:22 Behold, then, the kindness and severity of God. To those who fell, severity. But to you, God's kindness, if you remain in His kindness. Otherwise, you will be cut off.³⁰³ **11:23** And these others, if they do not continue in unbelief, they will be grafted in, because God is powerful enough to graft them in again.³⁰⁴ **11:24** For if you were cut off from what according to nature is a wild olive tree and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more certainly will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?³⁰⁵

Sub-section 11 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 11:25-32

11:25 Therefore, brothers, so that you are not trusting in your own wisdom, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, that a partial hardening has occurred to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.³⁰⁶ **11:26** And without further ado all Israel will be saved, just as it is written,

The One who delivers will come out of Zion. He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob
<Isaiah 59:20>,³⁰⁷ **11:27** and this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins" <Isaiah
59:21; Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34 >.³⁰⁸

11:28 On the one hand, they are enemies with respect to the good news on your account. On the other hand, they are beloved with respect to the choice on account of the fathers,³⁰⁹ **11:29** because the gracious gifts and calling of God are with no regret.³¹⁰ **11:30** Just as you formerly were disobedient to God and now have been granted mercy because of these ones' disobedience,³¹¹ **11:31** so also these are now disobedient for your being granted mercy, so that they now may be granted mercy.³¹² **11:32** God encloses all in disobedience, in order that He may show mercy to all.³¹³

Sub-section 12 of Section 2 of Part 2 of Main Discussion – 11:33-36

11:33 O the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unfathomable are His decrees and incomprehensible are His ways.³¹⁴

11:34 For who knows the mind of the Lord, or who has become His counselor <Isaiah 40:13>?³¹⁵

11:35 Or who first gives to Him that it should be paid back to him <Job 35:7; 41:11>?³¹⁶

11:36 For from Him, for the sake of Him, and for the purpose of Him are all things. To Him be the glory into the ages. Amen.³¹⁷

Second Discussion – 12:1-15:13

Part 1 of Second Discussion – 12:1-13:14

Section 1 of Part 1 of Second Discussion – 12:1

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brethren, in the light of God’s mercies, to present your bodies to God as a living, set apart, and pleasing sacrificial thank-offering—this being your genuine “ritual.”³¹⁸

Section 2 (a parenthesis) of Part 1 of Second Discussion – 12:2-8

12:2 And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you regard as worth paying attention to what the will of God is—that which is good and pleasing and will attain the intended outcome.³¹⁹ **12:3** For in the light of the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think of yourself so that you have an accurate grasp of reality, with a view to the fact that God has apportioned to each one a measure of His token as a guarantee.³²⁰

12:4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,³²¹ **12:5** so also we, the many, are one body in the Messiah and individually members of one another.³²² **12:6** As a result, we have different gifts according to the grace which is given to us. If the gift is prophecy, then it is according to the proportion of His token as a guarantee.³²³ **12:7** If it is service, then in it is in the very acts of serving. If it is as one who teaches, then it is in the very acts of teaching.³²⁴ **12:8** If it is exhortation, then it is in the very acts of exhortation. He who gives should do so with generosity. He who cares for others should do so with eagerness. He who shows mercy should do so with cheerfulness.³²⁵ **12:9** Our love is to be unhypocritical.³²⁶

Section 3 of Part 1 of Second Discussion – 12:9-21

Abhor what is evil. Be glued to what is good.³²⁷ **12:10** Be tenderly loving towards one another with brotherly love. Lead one another in being respectful.³²⁸ **12:11** Do not be lacking in diligence while seething in reference to your spirit as you serve the Lord.³²⁹ **12:12** Rejoice in the midst of hope. Endure in the midst of stress. Stand ready in the midst of prayer.³³⁰ **12:13** Share in the needs of the ones who are set apart. Pursue loving strangers.³³¹ **12:14** Speak well of and want the best for those who persecute you. Speak well of and want the best for them and do not curse them.³³² **12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.³³³ **12:16** Think the same towards one another. Do not set your mind on lofty things, but be carried away by humble things. Do not be wise in your own estimation.³³⁴

12:17 Pay back evil for evil to no one. Have regard for what is good before all men.³³⁵ **12:18** If possible, as far as it depends upon you, be at peace with all men.³³⁶ **12:19** Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but leave room for the wrath, because it is written,

“Vengeance is mine; I will repay,” says the Lord <Deuteronomy 32:35>.³³⁷

12:20 But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals of fire on his head <Proverbs 25:21,22>.³³⁸

12:21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.³³⁹

Section 4 of Part 1 of Second Discussion – 13:1-7

13:1 Let everyone obey the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which has been put there by God. And those which exist have been established by God,³⁴⁰ **13:2** so that he who opposes the authority has opposed God’s directive. And those who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.³⁴¹

13:3 For rulers are not intended to be a cause of fear with respect to good behavior but instead with respect to evil behavior. However, do you want there to be no fear of authority? Do

what is good and you will have praise from the same authority.³⁴² **13:4** For it is a servant of God for you for the purpose of encouraging good behavior. Therefore, if you do evil, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for nothing. Indeed, it is a servant of God, an avenger for the purpose of wrath on the one who practices evil.³⁴³

13:5 Therefore, it is necessary to be subordinate to it, not only on account of wrath, but also on account of our understanding.³⁴⁴ **13:6** For on account of this you pay taxes, for they are servants of God who are stand ready for this very thing.³⁴⁵ **13:7** Render to all the things that you owe them—tax to whom you owe tax, custom to whom you owe custom, fear to whom you owe fear, honor to whom you owe honor.³⁴⁶

Section 5 of Part 1 of Second Discussion – 13:8-10

13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves has fulfilled the Covenant,³⁴⁷ **13:9** because there is this—

You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not strongly desire <Exodus 20:13,14,15,17>.

And if there is any other commandment, it is summed up by this statement,

You shall love your neighbor as yourself <Leviticus 19:18>.³⁴⁸

13:10 Love does no evil towards one's neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the Covenant.³⁴⁹

Section 6 of Part 1 of Second Discussion – 13:11-14

13:11 And do this, knowing the season, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we believed [it was].³⁵⁰ **13:12** The night is almost gone, and the day has come near. Therefore let us lay aside the works of darkness, and let us put on the weapons of light.³⁵¹ **13:13** Let us behave properly as in the day—not with carousing and drunkenness, not with sexual promiscuity and sensual abandonment, and not with strife and envy.³⁵² **13:14** But put on the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, and make no plans for the flesh that are oriented towards its evil passions.³⁵³

Part 2 of Second Discussion – 14:1-15:13

Section 1 of Part 2 of Second Discussion – 14:1-4

14:1 Now, accept the one who is weak in his belief, but not for the purpose of arguing about personal views.³⁵⁴ **14:2** One person believes he can eat all things. Another person, who is weak, eats only vegetables.³⁵⁵ **14:3** Let him who eats not treat with contempt him who does not eat, and let him who does not eat not condemn him who eats, for God has accepted him.³⁵⁶

14:4 As for you, who are you who condemns the servant who belongs to another? For his own master he stands or falls. And he will be made to stand, because the Lord is strong enough to make him stand.³⁵⁷

Section 2 of Part 2 of Second Discussion – 14:5-11

14:5 For one person considers one day as more important than another, and another person considers every day alike. Each is allowed to be fully convinced in his own mind.³⁵⁸ **14:6** He who regards the day regards it for the Lord, and he who eats eats for the Lord, because he gives thanks to God. He who does not eat does not eat for the Lord, and he also gives thanks to God.³⁵⁹ **14:7** Not one of us lives for himself and not one of us dies for himself.³⁶⁰ **14:8** And if we live, we “live” for the Lord, and if we die, we “die” for the Lord. Therefore, whether we “live” or

“die,” we belong to the Lord.³⁶¹ 14:9 It was for this reason that the Messiah died and lived, so that he could be the master of those who die and those who live.³⁶²

14:10 As for you, why do you condemn your brother, or why do you treat your brother with contempt? For we shall all *stand* at the judgment seat of God,³⁶³ 14:11 because it was written,

“As I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow and every tongue will acknowledge God <Isaiah 45:23>.”³⁶⁴

Section 3 of Part 2 of Second Discussion – 14:12-15:3

14:12 Therefore, each one of us will give an account of himself to God.³⁶⁵ 14:13 As a result, let us no longer condemn one another but instead determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.³⁶⁶

14:14 I know and have become convinced by means of the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in and of itself. But to him who considers something to be unclean, to that person it is unclean.³⁶⁷ 14:15 For if your brother is caused emotional distress by food, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food the emotional well-being of that one for whom the Messiah died.³⁶⁸ 14:16 Therefore, do not allow what is good for you to be spoken of as evil,³⁶⁹ 14:17 because the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness, shalom, and joy by means of the Holy Spirit.³⁷⁰ 14:18 Thus, he who serves the Messiah in this way is pleasing to God and providing clear evidence to men.³⁷¹

14:19 Consequently, let us pursue doing things associated with shalom and with the building up of one another.³⁷² 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God on account of food. On the one hand, everything is clean, but, on the other hand, something becomes evil for the man who eats while being a stone over which someone trips.³⁷³ 14:21 It is good not to eat meat, not to drink wine, and not to do anything by which your brother is offended.³⁷⁴

14:22 As for you, hold on before God to the belief system which is truly yours. Happy is the one who does not condemn himself in what he finds acceptable.³⁷⁵ 14:23 But he who doubts if he were to eat is “condemned,” because it is not part of his belief system, and anything that is not part of his belief system is sin.³⁷⁶

15:1 And we, the capable ones, are obligated to bear with the weaknesses of the incapable ones and not just please ourselves.³⁷⁷ 15:2 Let each of us please his neighbor for the purpose of bringing about what is good, for the edification of his neighbor.³⁷⁸ 15:3 For, indeed, the Messiah did not please himself, but just as it was written,

The disapprovals of those who disapprove of You fell upon me <Psalm 69:9>.³⁷⁹

Section 4 of Part 2 of Second Discussion – 15:4-13

15:4 For whatever was written beforehand was written for our instruction, so that, through perseverance and the persuasion of the scriptures, we may have hope.³⁸⁰ 15:5 May the God of perseverance and persuasion give to you the same perspective among one another according to the Messiah Jesus,³⁸¹ 15:6 so that, from the same impulse with one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.³⁸²

15:7 Therefore, accept one another just as the Messiah also accepted you to call attention to the awesomeness of God.³⁸³ 15:8 For I say that the Messiah has become a servant of the circumcision for the sake of the truth of God, in order that He confirm the promises that were given to the patriarchs³⁸⁴ 15:9 and so that the Gentiles may glorify God for the sake of His mercy, just as it was written,

Therefore, I shall confess You among the Gentiles and I shall sing to Your name <2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49>.³⁸⁵

15:10 And again it says,

Rejoice, Gentiles, with His people < Deuteronomy 32:43>.³⁸⁶

15:11 And again,

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him < Psalm 117:1>.³⁸⁷

15:12 And again Isaiah says,

There shall be the root of Jesse, even he who rises to rule over the Gentiles. Because of him the Gentiles shall have hope < Isaiah 11:10>.³⁸⁸

15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in the midst of your believing, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.³⁸⁹

Third Discussion – 15:14-33

Part 1 of Third Discussion – 15:14-21

Section 1 of Part 1 of Third Discussion – 15:14-16

15:14 I myself am convinced concerning you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, having been filled with all knowledge, being capable indeed of warning and instructing one another.³⁹⁰ 15:15 But I have written to you very boldly on some issues as one who is reminding you on account of the grace which was given to me by God,³⁹¹ 15:16 so that I could be a liturgical servant of the Messiah Jesus to the Gentiles, performing the sacred rites of the good news of God, in order that my offering of the Gentiles would be acceptable, having been set apart by the Holy Spirit.³⁹²

Section 2 of Part 1 of Third Discussion – 15:17-21

15:17 Therefore, I have reason to boast in the Messiah Jesus in the things pertaining to God.³⁹³ 15:18 For I will not be so bold as to talk about something except what the Messiah accomplishes through me for the purpose of the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,³⁹⁴ 15:19 by the capacity of signs and wonders, by the capacity of the Spirit of God, so that I may fill out the good news of the Messiah from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum.³⁹⁵ 15:20 In this manner, I had as my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where the Messiah was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation,³⁹⁶ 15:21 but just as it was written,

For those who had no information concerning him proclaimed, they will see, and those who did not hear will understand <Isaiah 52:15>.³⁹⁷

Part 2 of Third Discussion – 15:22-29

15:22 As a result, for many reasons I have indeed been prevented from coming to you.³⁹⁸ 15:23 But now, no longer having a place in these regions and having had a strong desire for many years to come to you³⁹⁹ 15:24 (whenever I to go to Spain, for I hope as I pass through to see you and to be sent forth there by you, if I may first enjoy your company for a while),⁴⁰⁰ 15:25 I am nevertheless going to Jerusalem to serve the set apart ones,⁴⁰¹ 15:26 because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a certain contribution to the poor among the set apart ones in Jerusalem.⁴⁰² 15:27 For they were well pleased, and they are indebted to them, because, if they contributed to the Gentiles from their spiritual things, then the Gentiles are obligated to serve them by means of material things.⁴⁰³ 15:28 Subsequently, after I have completed this and sealed

this fruit for them, I will go on to Spain via you.⁴⁰⁴ **15:29** Plus, I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of the Messiah.⁴⁰⁵

Part 3 of Third Discussion – 15:30-33

15:30 I exhort you, brothers, in view of our Lord Jesus the Messiah and because of the Holy Spirit, to strive with me in your prayers on my behalf to God,⁴⁰⁶ **15:31** so that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea and so that my service to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the set apart ones.⁴⁰⁷ **15:32** The result will be that when I come with joy to you by the will of God, I will be refreshed in your company.⁴⁰⁸

15:33 The God of shalom be with you all. Amen.⁴⁰⁹

Ending Discussion – 16:1-25

Part 1 of Ending Discussion – 16:1-16

16:1 I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the gathering in Cenchrea,⁴¹⁰ **16:2** so that you welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the set apart ones, and so that you may stand by her in whatever she needs from you. She has been a benefactor to many, including to me.⁴¹¹

16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in the Messiah Jesus,⁴¹² **16:4** who, for my life, risked their own necks, to whom do not only I give thanks, but also all the gatherings of the Gentiles,⁴¹³ **16:5** including that which is in their own house.

Greet Epaenetus, the one whom I love, who is the first one to convert to the Messiah in Asia.⁴¹⁴

16:6 Greet Mary, who has greatly labored for you.⁴¹⁵

16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and fellow prisoners, who are well-known among the apostles, who were indeed in the Messiah before me.⁴¹⁶

16:8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.⁴¹⁷

16:9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in the Messiah, and Stachus, my beloved.⁴¹⁸

16:10 Greet Apelles, the one who has been approved in the Messiah. Greet those who are from among those of Aristobulus.⁴¹⁹

16:11 Greet Herodian, my relative. Greet those who are from among those of Narcissus, those who are in the Lord.⁴²⁰

16:12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, laborers in the Lord. Greet Persis, the beloved, who has labored greatly in the Lord.⁴²¹

16:13 Greet Rufus, the chosen one in the Lord, and his and my mother.⁴²²

16:14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them.⁴²³

16:15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, and all those who are with them.⁴²⁴

16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the gatherings of the Messiah greet you.⁴²⁵

Part 2 of Ending Discussion – 16:17-20

16:17 I urge you, brothers, to keep an eye out for those who cause divisions and stumbling blocks contrary to the teaching which you have learned. Turn away from them,⁴²⁶ **16:18** because such men are not serving our Lord the Messiah but their own appetites. Through their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent.⁴²⁷

16:19 The report of your obedience has reached everyone. Therefore, I rejoice over you, and I desire that you be wise with respect to what is good and innocent with respect to what is evil.⁴²⁸

16:20 The God of shalom will quickly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.⁴²⁹

16:21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, along with Lucius, Jason, and Sopater, my kinsmen.⁴³⁰

Part 3 of Ending Discussion – 16:21-23

16:22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you because of the Lord.⁴³¹

16:23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole gathering, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, greets you, along with Quartus, the brother.⁴³²

16:24 The grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah be with all of you. Amen.⁴³³

Part 4 of Ending Discussion – 16:24-27

16:25 To Him who has the power to establish you according to my message of the good news and the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, according to the revealing of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,⁴³⁴ **16:26** but now has been manifested, even through the writings of the prophets, which, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the Gentiles for the purpose of their obedience of belief,⁴³⁵ **16:27** to the only wise God, in view of Jesus the Messiah, be the glory into the ages. Amen.⁴³⁶

¹ Παῦλος δούλος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφορισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ – Paul identifies himself as “a slave of the Messiah Jesus,” someone who considers Jesus to be his master, who orders him to do what he demands, and Paul simply obeys him. In this case, it is as an “apostle,” to which God has “called” him, meaning that He has summoned Paul to fulfill the role of a man who proclaims the information that Jesus conveyed to his other apostles about himself as the one anointed by God to restore the Kingdom of Israel, offer himself as a sacrifice to God for people’s sins, and to proclaim like a prophet the truth of God’s plans and purposes to bring about the eternal Kingdom of God. Thus, Paul is “individually separated” by God from the rest of the Jews and the rest of humanity for the purpose of “the good news of God,” the best news any sinful human being can hear about salvation from God’s wrath and condemnation through the forgiveness of sins that Jesus as a priest to God brings.

See Acts 9 for the whole story of Paul’s conversion and being instructed by God through Jesus the Messiah to become his authoritative apostle to the Gentiles. He was confronted by the resurrected Jesus on his way to Damascus, Syria to arrest Christians. Jesus announced to Paul that he was now one of his apostles with the unique responsibility to tell non-Jews, i.e., Gentiles, about him as the Jewish Messiah, the unique man who will free the Jews from their earthly enemies and restore the Kingdom of Israel and who will free both Jews and Gentiles from God’s wrath and eternal condemnation so that they acquire eternal life.

The situation in Rome is that, for eight years since the edict of A.D. 48 by the emperor Claudius to expel all the Jews from Rome, Gentiles have become Christians but have not had to live their Christianity in the presence of Jews. However, Claudius has died, thus allowing Jews to return to the capital city, and Paul is concerned that they will pressure Gentile Christians to follow the Mosaic Covenant as the basis for their salvation from God instead of Jesus and his death and resurrection being this basis. Thus, at the outset of this letter, Paul mentions his qualifications that allow him to speak authoritatively on the subject of Christianity for both Jews and Gentiles along with Jesus’ qualifications for being the Messiah.

He will then go on in the letter to compare and contrast proper belief in Jesus for both Jewish and Gentile Christians with following the Mosaic Covenant by the Jew who misunderstands it. The key will be the inward change in a sinner that God produces through the invisible work of His Holy Spirit that produces both authentic belief and obedience to God in the midst of a person’s continued sinfulness until he dies and/or Jesus returns to begin the glory of the eternal Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, God has not rejected the Jews but will fulfill His promise to them through Abraham to shape them into the most powerful nation in world history. Others have tried to become supreme rulers of the world, but only Jesus as God’s Messiah will succeed. It is also important to keep in mind what kind of life Paul’s readers, Gentile Christians, once lived as worshipers of false gods in Rome where behavior completely antithetical to biblical morality prevailed and was encouraged under the umbrella of the religion of false gods. For example, in Romans 12, Paul will exhort them to love and care for one another, including for their fellow Jewish Christians, in a manner that arrogant, presumptuous, narcissistic, and selfish worshipers of Jupiter never even dreamed of. The radical change in their belief system, worldview, and behavior was astonishing.

² ὁ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἀγίαις – The information and the message about a human being who comes and fulfills the role of the Jewish Messiah are not new. They are found “in the sacred scriptures” of the Old Testament, whose writers as truthful “prophets” of God reveal His plan to use the Jewish Messiah to rescue the Jewish people from their enemies and both Jews and Gentiles from His eternal condemnation according to the Abrahamic Covenant. These “scriptures” are such that they present the truth of God inerrantly, infallibly, and authoritatively—the only documents besides the New Testament that do.

With their writings, the OT prophets offer their explanations of God’s promises and the history of the nation of Israel as these unfold where the Messiah will be at the center of His fulfilling these promises. However, the Messiah does not arrive before the OT writers are finished with what they communicate. Then, the NT picks up where they left off.

Here, it is mainly to the OT, because the New Testament did not yet exist, that Paul refers the Roman Christians for their acquiring a knowledge and understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Yet, he is going to provide them with his own apostolic and inerrant rendition to instruct them in the uniqueness of Jesus for their eternal salvation.

³ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἑγενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα – The “good news” of v. 1 is “concerning [God’s] Son.” This is a technical term for the descendant of David who acts as both the final king of the Kingdom of Israel, i.e., the Kingdom of God, and the priest of sinful human beings, who will need him as their advocate at the judgment of God in order to obtain His eternal mercy.

Consequently, Paul says of Jesus that he “came into existence out of the seed of David” and “in accordance with his flesh” as such. Because his mother, Mary, was a descendant of David, Jesus is also considered to be of the same, even though God miraculously created the zygote in her uterus. His physical being, his “flesh,” was genetically connected to David through Mary, and he is the final and ultimate “Son of God” who will rule over God’s property of the land of Israel and the world and do so with the same authority as God Himself.

See 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2, Psalm 8, Psalm 89, and other OT passages, which describe the Davidic Covenant where God declares to David as the first Son of God that his descendant, initially Solomon, will also be the Son of God. However, as a complete human being acting in the role of God within the creation, Jesus becomes the one and only descendant of David who will also act in the role of King of the eternal Kingdom of God and Priest at the final judgment (see Hebrews). David and all other of his descendants who were kings of Israel, e.g., Solomon, Rehoboam, et al., were neither priests nor the *final* king of Israel. These

roles are designated for the one unique descendant of David, Jesus of Nazareth.

⁴ τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν. Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν – Paul is saying that it was Jesus of Nazareth, who “was designated the Son of God.”

And this was done “with power,” i.e., with the power of the transcendent creator who raised him from the dead. Thus, also, it was “by virtue of his resurrection from the dead.”

And it was “in accordance with his spirit of being set apart,” where “spirit” is who he was and is in God’s mind and the role that He wants him to play in the story of human history.” This role is definitely one that is “set apart” from those of all other human beings, because Jesus is the unique and final Son of God, who died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and will go on to rule the Kingdom of Israel and the eternal Kingdom of God.

Therefore, Jesus is also the “Messiah,” the anointed one of Israel, who fulfills all these roles as promised beforehand by the prophets of the OT.

He is also “our Lord,” our primary master and teacher whose instructions and commandments we obey and follow above all other authorities and teachers in our lives. Paul uses the 1st person plural possessive pronoun to refer to others with him in Corinth, where he is writing this letter, who are his apostolic co-workers, even though he does not name them here. Instead, he lists them at the end of the letter in 16:21—Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sopater. Probably, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus can be included in this list. Paul will mention the Roman Christians as “you” in v. 6.

Jesus was a completely different human being from all others who have lived on earth. He was not only morally perfect but also God incarnate, so that his entire life of announcing his identity and verifying it through his actions, especially his crucifixion, qualified him to be declared by God to be the Son of God and Messiah, which God affirmed by raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was also unique among all human beings in that he was the only Son of God, i.e., in the line of David, Solomon, Rehoboam, et al., who would be the permanent and eternal Son of God, who would rule over the eternal Kingdom of God.

⁵ δι’ οὗ ἐλάβομεν χάριν καὶ ἀποστολὴν εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως ἐν πάσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ – Paul has already switched from the 1st person singular to 1st person plural in order to include his current traveling companion, Timothy, as a member of his apostolic entourage, probably along with others who are mentioned in 16:21ff.

Romans 16:21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, along with Lucius, Jason, and Sopater, my kinsmen.

Paul comments that God has given them grace, which he will say later is the key element of God’s motivation to move in an active way towards sinful human beings who deserve only His anger and destruction.

For example, Romans 3:24, “so that they are justified as a gift by means of His grace in the light of the redemption that is because of the Messiah Jesus”.

Also, Paul says that they have received “apostleship” from God. It is He who has assigned this responsibility to Paul specifically as the apostle to the Gentiles. But his co-workers such as Timothy share this responsibility with him in a substantive manner. They are supportive of him, teach with him, and are willing to suffer with him for the sake of good news of Jesus as the Messiah. Paul knows, too, that if God has assigned him the responsibility of proclaiming to the Gentiles the message of Jesus as the Messiah, that it will not be for nothing. There will be a positive response of genuine obedience to the message among the Gentiles. It will be “for the obedience of belief for his name’s sake among all the Gentiles.” Some Gentiles will genuinely believe the gospel and order their lives in line with the moral commandments of God and Jesus. And all this is for the sake of Jesus’ name, i.e., his purpose and what he is all about. In other words, Jesus’ mission would not be complete if there were no Gentiles to rule over in the Kingdom of God. He will restore the Kingdom of Israel for the Jews, and he will bring about eternal salvation and life for both Jews and Gentiles, who will inhabit the eternal earth of the new creation of Revelation 21.

⁶ ἐν οἷς ἐστε καὶ ὑμεῖς κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – Just as Paul in v. 1 identified himself as someone “called to be an apostle,” he is stating that these Roman Gentile Christians are among those whom God has purposed to become believers in Jesus as the Messiah, even though an apostle had not personally been the tool of God to provide them with this information. God has “called” them to genuine belief and eternal salvation. Paul will also mention in chapter 8 that this kind of calling happens because of God’s foreknowledge and predestination.

This also shows that people in the 1st century Roman Empire were becoming Christians apart from personal contact with an apostle, while they were equally dependent as all other Christians on the apostles as the source of authoritative truth regarding Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the truth that became the New Testament of our Bibles.

⁷ πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἁγαπητοῖς θεοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, ἡ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – These Roman Christians are “the ones loved by God,” meaning that He has demonstrated His love to these Gentiles by changing them inwardly and causing them to grab onto the New Testament message by their abandoning their former Roman paganism and believing in Jesus as the Messiah, thus making them really different and of a completely separate category in comparison to their non-Jewish, pagan friends and fellow-citizens of Rome. Thus, they are “called to be those set apart.” He was summoned them through their hearing the gospel and His changing them inwardly to draw them to Himself and to make them members of the group that is separated from the rest of humanity and who will acquire eternal life.

What a radical change for non-Jews living so far away from Israel and having had probably very little exposure to Old Testament Judaism. It would take a miracle of God to pull this off.

Paul ends this introduction by wishing further kindness from God (χάρις) and wholeness in life as much as is possible for a

depraved human being in the present, temporal realm, and certainly on into the eternal realm (εἰρήνη = shalom = the most fulfilling existence possible for a human being). Thus, his salutation is for this kindness and wholeness to come both from God who is the Father (source) of Christians by virtue of His creating and choosing them, and from Jesus as the final Davidic king, which will especially be the case at the final judgment when Jesus is a successful advocate before the Father for eternal mercy on behalf of authentic believers.

The two ideas of God's love for people and their being different from the rest of humanity are also mentioned by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "We are obligated to thank God always for you, brothers, who are loved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation because of your set-apart spirit and belief in the truth."

This is the fourth time in these first seven verses that Paul puts together the words Jesus and Messiah. He is the point of his information and God's purposes for bringing about the eternal salvation of sinners in human history.

⁸ Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου ὁδὶα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἕπερι πάντων ὑμῶν ὅτι ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ – Paul has heard even in Corinth in Greece about these Gentile Christians and their becoming believers in the Jewish Messiah. He then probably extrapolates that if this news has reached Greece, then it has spread to other parts of the Roman Empire, i.e., to "the whole world."

Thus, Paul thanks God because of Jesus' activity as the Messiah that He has cause these Romans to have changed hearts and, as a result, authentic belief and obedience towards God and Jesus.

⁹ μάρτυς γάρ μου ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, ᾧ λατρεύω ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἕμου ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὡς ἀδιαλείπτως μνεῖαν ὑμῶν ποιοῦμαι – While Jesus' "spirit," i.e., God's intended role for him within the story that He has composed, characterizes him as a human being to be the Messiah, Paul's "spirit" characterizes him to be a caring and loving apostle regarding "the good news" of God's "Son," so that he deals properly with other human beings, which includes his speaking to God through prayer about these Roman Gentile Christians whom he has never seen.

It is not that Paul is always (ἀδιαλείπτως) praying and doing nothing else, because there are other things that he does in life, such as proclaim the gospel, eat his food, converse with other people, etc., i.e., things that include what all human beings do. Instead, he repeatedly (ἀδιαλείπτως) prays for these Romans Christians (and other Christians) when he gets the opportunity.

¹⁰ πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου δεόμενος εἶ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐδοθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς – Whenever Paul does get the opportunity to pray, as a good apostle, he would love to visit Rome and interact with these Gentiles regarding the message of Jesus as the Messiah and mentions this. Thus, he requests of God that he eventually get to Rome and spend some time with them. But he recognizes that it must be according to the "will of God" (ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ) that he reach Rome, just as it is has to be God's will that anything occurs within the creation. Paul acknowledges that any success on his part in making it to Rome will be because God allows it based upon his sovereign writing of the story of creation. Until then, he must wait for God to include this in His story.

Little does Paul know that his trip to Rome will finally happen because of his being arrested in Jerusalem and put on trial by both the Jews and the Romans as Luke relates in Acts 21ff.

¹¹ ἐπιποθῶ γάρ ἰδεῖν ὑμᾶς, ἵνα τι μεταδῶ χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικὸν εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς – Not that these Roman Christians could not obtain eternal life strictly through their belief in Jesus as a result of what they have heard so far about him, but Paul desires to firm up more completely their understanding of the biblical message by using his apostolic knowledge, skills, and authority to convey the message to them. Thus he says in v. 15 that he is eager "to proclaim the good news" of Jesus as the Messiah to them in Rome. The result would be that Paul would give the Roman Gentile Christians a gift, indeed a "spiritual gift" (χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικόν), his clear understanding of the apostolic message that would establish and enhance their understanding of it (εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς), which, in turn, would provide them with a greater intellectual foundation for believing these ideas.

Paul will say in the next verse that this would also result in their giving him a gift—the enjoyment of seeing other people embrace these biblical ideas, which, in turn, would strengthen his own belief as he experiences a level of God-given success in his efforts to carry out his God-mandated responsibility of proclaiming the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah to the Gentiles of the Roman Empire (see Acts 9).

¹² τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν συμπαρακληθῆναι ἕν ὑμῖν διὰ τῆς ἐν ἀλλήλοις πίστεως ὑμῶν τε καὶ ἐμοῦ – Paul also confirms that, in spite of his being an apostle, he benefits from interacting with other Christians by being encouraged by their genuine belief for the sake of his genuine belief and commitment to the NT message. He probably helps himself by listening to his own words as he repeats the ideas that he has known and been teaching for many years after restudying the Old Testament with Jesus' help and learning it accurately—that it points to Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish Messiah and eternal king and priest. And his listeners help him by interacting with him on these ideas and embracing them with intellectual assent, joy, and enthusiasm—that comes from their changed hearts.

¹³ οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνωεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι πολλάκις προεθέμην ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἐκωλύθη ἄχρι τοῦ δεῦρο, ἵνα τινὰ καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν καθὼς καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν – Paul's desire is to let the Roman Christians know how much he has sought to visit them in order that he may fulfill his Gentile responsibility towards even them, in spite of the fact that they are

already Christians. He wants to see their understanding of the Jewish Messiah grow from personal contact with him, an apostle, especially after they have come out of Roman paganism and converted to a belief in the one, true God and His Messiah. However, his plans to do so just have not come together so far—because it is not yet God’s sovereign desire for it to happen. As I have mentioned, it will happen later as Luke tells us in Acts 27-28.

¹⁴ Ἐλληνσίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις ὀφειλέτης εἰμί – Paul’s apostolic responsibility as given to him by God requires that he proclaim the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah to all whom he encounters, while eventually his main obligation is to the Gentiles, which includes “barbarians,” i.e., slaves who have been acquired from far away lands that have been conquered by the Romans and who definitely are considered as lower class inhabitants of the Romans Empire. Paul has tried to communicate the information about Jesus to the Jews, but he mostly met with rejection (see Acts 13-14). Thus, he learned his lesson both from the original statement that Jesus had made to him about sending him to the Gentiles and from the obvious lack of interest in Jesus as their Messiah by the Jews. He definitely is called to be the one and only apostle to the Gentiles. As long as a person is a living, breathing non-Jewish human being, Paul is theologically obligated to proclaim to him the message of Jesus’ messiahship. This is to both the upper class, the “Greeks,” i.e., people who have adopted the Greek culture because of its sophistication, and the lower class, “the barbarians” who lack cultural sophistication.

¹⁵ οὕτως τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ῥώμῃ εὐαγγελίσασθαι – Probably especially because Rome is Rome, Paul would love to get there and present this information about the Jewish Messiah to its community. And the fact that his readers are already believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah does not at all diminish his enthusiasm to “evangelize” them, i.e., to proclaim the good news of God’s eternal mercy that is made available through Jesus as high priest on the day of judgment and king in the eternal Kingdom of God.

¹⁶ Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡ δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε ἠρώτων καὶ Ἑλληνι – Certainly, Paul would never really be embarrassed about the information of Jesus as the Messiah. After all, the biblical message of Jesus of Nazareth as the eternal Jewish Messiah is the most important information that a human being can hear. Therefore, this must be simply a way for Paul to state the importance of the information. But is he thinking that the Roman Christians might become embarrassed by it when they feel the pressure from Jews to make the Mosaic Covenant central to their relationship with God. “Oops, we did not realize we were on the wrong path,” they might think. Paul will affirm the centrality of Jesus in this letter—as he does in all his letters.

When God uses the gospel in a person’s life and heart, it packs a divine and powerful punch by causing the person to be changed inwardly so as to believe it, thus qualifying him to escape God’s eternal condemnation and the destruction that he deserves. Because the Jews are God’s “chosen people” on earth and play a special role of revealing God as a people group to all other people groups in the present realm (see Deuteronomy 4), they, in a sense, have the right of first refusal to the message with the Gentiles’ following just behind in their right to hear the message and either embrace it or reject it. Here Paul uses “Greek” to refer to not just the sophisticated upper class of Roman society, but to all non-Jews regardless of their station in society.

¹⁷ δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται – The Greek word *dikaisounay* (δικαιοσύνη) basically means forgiveness, i.e., being released by God from one’s obligation as a sinful human being to be punished eternally for having rebelled against God. Thus, a person is pardoned of his crime or crimes. It is this release from eternal punishment that God grants to people who genuinely believe the message of Jesus as the Messiah (see Romans 3:21ff.). The word justification incorporates these ideas.

It is not that “belief” *per se* is some sort of magic wand that a human being waves in order to obtain justification and escape God’s condemnation, but it is that which identifies a person’s fundamental commitment to an understanding of the nature of reality that matches God’s. And it is this latter idea that God requires to be saved from His wrath and condemnation. If a person believes wholeheartedly that the moon is made of Swiss cheese and declares that this is his most important knowledge of the nature of reality, then this identifies his fundamental commitment, so that he lives his life in the light of this apparent fact. In other words, his every thought and action can be related to and tied to his belief that the moon is made of Swiss cheese, even if it cannot be tied to other things that are true. If a person believes wholeheartedly that Jesus is the biblical Messiah, so that he lives his life in the light of this fact, then this identifies his most basic commitment as a human being and qualifies him to escape God’s eternal condemnation.

In Habbakuk, God promises through and to the prophet not only that He is going to bring destruction upon the Jews by means of the Babylonians, but also that He is going to grant eternal life to any Jew who genuinely believes Him for His promises through Abraham to shape the Jews eventually into a great nation and to rescue into eternal life anyone, Jew or Gentile, who authentically mimics Abraham’s belief in Him. Here Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, where God declares that the proud Jew will reject the biblical message, even while religiously performing the Mosaic Covenant. On the other hand, the Jew who is willing to believe the promises that God gave to Abraham, even while experiencing God’s judgment on the Jews in Habakkuk’s day, will receive eternal life. Thus, pride is the enemy of belief and truth, while humility is their friend. See Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38 where Habakkuk 2:4 is also quoted in the NT.

Paul explicitly states the importance of belief here at the beginning of the letter and will develop his case that it is belief brought about by the miraculous inward work of the Spirit of God which marks an authentic child of God as opposed to someone’s simply performing the religious system of the Mosaic Covenant by virtue of their natural human ability to make choices and engage in living life in a religious manner. By extrapolation, this is also true of anyone simply doing Christianity without actually being changed internally at the level of the commitments of his heart by God’s Spirit. Paul will also show in chapter 4 that

anyone's belief that is of the same kind as Abraham's is what qualifies the person for eternal salvation, just like any Jew's belief that is of the same kind as their ancestor Abraham's. Abraham's belief was in the light of the truth which God had presented him, not an add-on to religious behavior he was performing in line with, for example, the Mosaic Covenant.

¹⁸ Ἀποκαλύπτεται γὰρ ὀργὴ θεοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικία κατεχόντων – The present tense is probably not saying that God is currently expressing His anger towards unbelievers. Instead, Paul means that He is set to express it at the end of this age, what in 2:3 he calls “the judgment of God [NAS95]” and in 2:5 “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God [NAS95].”

There are two possible responses from God to us human beings. The response that we deserve is His anger along with eternal condemnation and destruction, because we have rebelled against Him as Paul goes on to explain. See [Romans 2:5](#) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God [NAS95].

The response that we do not deserve is His kindness and mercy, which God grants to those whom He chooses, as Paul will also go on to explain in chapter 8. He begins here with God's anger for the sake of the Roman Gentile Christians, to make sure their understanding of the biblical message is fundamental and accurate. It is from out of the midst of God's future anger that the Roman Christians have escaped. But how is it that Gentiles, who have probably not been exposed directly to even the Old Testament writings, are deserving of God's eternal condemnation? Does not this seem a bit unfair. Paul will explain otherwise in chapter 1—that all human beings know God exists and that they should worship and seek to obey Him. They also know that they stand eternally condemned before Him if they do not.

Paul starts by indicating that human beings naturally push any ideas about God of which they are aware out of their minds by using immoral means to do so. In other words, they engage in immoral thinking and behavior in order to avoid dealing with good moral thinking and behavior. They run from truth by running towards falsehood. They run from authentic morality by running towards immorality. They run from righteousness and goodness by running towards sin and evil. Paul is saying that this is just people's inherent nature. They use whatever technique they can devise, even if they call it seeking truth and refer to the Bible (see Romans 2 and the self-righteous Jew), to avoid the biblical truth.

¹⁹ διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφάνερωσεν – God is definitely knowable by all human beings. He has not hidden Himself from any of us, but instead has revealed Himself to all. This is the reason why God will act with anger and justice towards all human beings who reject Him, even pagan Gentiles in Rome, who have probably never been directly exposed to the Old Testament writings before hearing about Jesus as the Messiah. We all are equally deserving of eternal condemnation, regardless of when in human history or where on this earth we have lived. Indeed, we all are as deserving of God's condemnation as anyone who knows all there is to know about God from the Bible and yet rejects this information. It is not the amount of information about God that rescues a human being from God's anger and destruction. It is the quality of a person's response to God that does. Paul will make this clear in Romans 2:3-10.

Paul goes on to explain how God has clearly revealed Himself to all human beings.

²⁰ τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἢ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης – The mere fact that the cosmos exists and that it obviously must have been created by a transcendent Creator communicates directly to all human beings' minds that there is a God. Thus, the human mind is fully capable of grasping the fact that there is a transcendent, eternal, creator God who has brought all that we see, touch, and feel into existence. We cannot see, touch, or feel Him, but we perceive the effects of His power and transcendence. Therefore, it is not just that the human mind has the ability to detect that God is there. It cannot help itself but do so. God's existence is a first principle of human knowledge. Because of the way that God has designed the human beings' minds, they must and will come to the conclusion that God exists and has created all that we see, touch, feel, and hear.

Thus, the issue is not if God exists. The issue is what does as human being do with the clear and obvious information that his mind naturally takes in and that he cannot refuse at one level?

²¹ εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ ἠὲ χάριστησαν, ἀλλ' ἐματαίωθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία – Therefore, no human being can defend himself before God to the effect that he does not deserve His eternal condemnation, not even those who are apparently completely ignorant of God because they have never heard about Him from the Bible.

Instead, there is something about our moral makeup that compels us to rebel against God, neither granting Him the respect that He deserves nor the gratitude that we should obviously give Him for His provision in our lives. In addition, people devise explanations for reality that are just plain stupid, and their inward, moral condition can be described as being like people wandering in darkness who have no clue as to where they are really going. Indeed, the darkness of their inward condition keeps getting worse and worse as they progress through life—unless God changes their inwardness by His Spirit (see Romans 2:28,,29).

Dallas Willard in his book [Knowing Christ Today](#) quotes a professor of biology in the Introduction, “Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear... There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That's the end for me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life, and no free will for humans, either.” Soren Kierkegaard in his book [The Sickness Unto Death](#) would cite this as a prime example of someone living in despair.

²² φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν καὶ ἤλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιωματι εἰκόνοσ φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἐρπετῶν – Human beings love to take themselves way too seriously, especially when it comes to the value of their ideas. People actually think that they have got reality figured out and are pretty smart for

having done so. In our day, academicians and scientists are so proud of themselves for promoting the notion that Darwinian evolution is the source of our existence and concluding that there is no God, not basis for ethics, and no life after death. In this way, people actually think that they have got reality figured out. Nevertheless, they are fools as they ascribe worth, power, and control of the cosmos to elements only within the cosmos—and not to God!

In Paul's day, pagan idolatry is the predominant way of explaining reality with the use of figurines to represent the natural elements of the universe that are all that exist. The people call these natural elements gods, because they believe that it is these elements that *ultimately* are the life-giving and life-changing forces of reality. The problem is not the figurines *per se*, but the fact that people ascribe so much value, worth, and power to created elements that could disappear in a heartbeat if the transcendent Creator God chose to stop creating them. And they do this while ignoring the One who cannot disappear, because He is eternal and all-powerful. And, of course, it is He, not the forces within the creation, who deserves their attention, worship, approbation, and gratitude for His power and provision.

²³ Διὸ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς – With bad ideas about reality come bad actions within reality. Because of people's willful rejection of God, as the story that He is telling goes, He lets them run amok with their moral rebellion into all kinds of immoral activities that result in the misuse of their bodies and their dishonoring themselves by not using their bodies for the intended purposes for which God has designed them with their minds, i.e., for them to think and do that which is moral. The fact is also that people long to rebel against God more than anything, and they choose to fulfill their longings in rebellion against God. This is the basic way of defining their sinfulness.

In Romans 7 & 8, Paul will identify the “flesh,” a sinful human being's foundation moral nature, as the source of his evil cravings. In Romans 2 he will indicate that it is a person's “unrepentant heart,” which is a heart that is committed to disobeying God, that leads him to choose to do what is immoral. Here in Romans 1 Paul is saying that the combination of a person's defining essence as evil (“flesh”) and his “heart” that is committed to evil that results in the “cravings of his heart” leading him to engage in moral uncleanness and dishonor his body.

This is the first of three comments by Paul in Romans 1 of God's “handing over” sinful people to their own innate, evil desires to engage in immoral activity (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός)—

1) here, “in the cravings of their hearts to moral uncleanness” – where the heart and desires of man are oriented towards ignoring God and pursuing their own selfish goals apart from learning from Him how to live life well according to His moral commandments

2) in v. 26, “to shameful passions,” where men and women reject that which is natural in sexual intercourse, heterosexuality, and embrace and engage in that which is unnatural, homosexuality

3) in v. 28, “to a defective mind to do things that are morally inappropriate,” which Paul lists in vs. 29-32, all the way up to people knowing that they deserve eternal death from God, but they still disobey Him and encourage others to do the same. see [Isaiah 64:7](#) There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities (καὶ παρέδωκας ἡμᾶς διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν).

[Leviticus 7:20](#) ‘But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to Yahweh, in his uncleanness (וְאִשׁוּרֵי אֲכָלָהּ) (καὶ ἡ ἀκαθαρσία αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ), that person shall be cut off from his people.’

[Leviticus 16:16](#) “He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel (וְגִיּוֹרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραηλ) and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins (וְכָל חַטֹּאתֵיהֶם) (καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδικημάτων αὐτῶν περὶ πασῶν τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν); and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities ().

Our sinful longings are powerful inclinations, and sometimes we cannot keep from fulfilling them, even as Christians. The good news, though, is that Christians long more to be forgiven than they do to be ungodly.

[Romans 4:5](#) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the **ungodly**, his faith is credited as righteousness [NAS95].

²⁴ οἵτινες μετέλλαξαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ψεύδει καὶ ἐσεβάσθησαν καὶ ἐλάτρευσαν τὴ κτίσει παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα, ὅς ἐστιν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. ἀμήν – The result of people's rebellion against God and sinfulness is that they look to only the creation for the ultimate source of causation within it. The ancient peoples ascribed names and personalities to the forces of nature and called them gods. More modern people speak of Mother Nature but consider evolution to be personless, mindless, and yet “smart” enough to choose to cause adapting and coping characteristics within organisms that also have “decided” to become such from disorganized organic material. People “even revere and serve” their own evil cravings as part of the creation and which Paul will go on to describe. Thus, people ignore God and the worship and praise that He deserves for all His accomplishments. The notion of “exchange” is prominent here in Paul's thoughts. Either a person retains truth and its accompanying component of morality, or he substitutes a counterfeit, the lie that God does not exist and does not demand moral thinking and behavior from His human creatures. To exchange skim milk for whole milk is one thing and certainly not condemnable by God. To exchange the truth about God for a lie involving His creation is to be deserving of eternal condemnation by God.

²⁵ Διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας, αἶ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετέλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν – Paul says that God lets people run with their rebellion against Him to the extent that women fulfill their “natural” human sexual passions and desires via an unnatural avenue, homosexuality. Just as people refuse to grant the Creator of nature the attention that He is due, they also refuse to grant His design of nature the place that it is due. Thus, they act contrary to God's

design of nature as part of their rebellion against God and claim that the design is other than it is, indeed, the very opposite of what God intends.

Paul uses homosexuality as a clear example of a misuse of God's design. It is impossible for women to procreate through sexual "intercourse" with one another, just as it is impossible for men to do so likewise. The sexual passion is a strong passion, but fulfilling it through a misuse of God's design is to rebel against God.

²⁶ ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσειν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες – Paul says that not only do women engage in homosexuality that is clearly contrary to the design of nature as part of their rebellion against God, but so do men. Here, Paul also mentions that there will be a consequence that must follow from God's being a God of justice. He has already mentioned it as God's anger, resulting in eternal destruction.

²⁷ Καὶ καθὼς οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει, παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα – Paul has intimidated this already, that people are rebelliously defective in their thinking about God, so that when God turns them loose to continue to rebel against Him, their defective thinking leads them to act in all sorts of immoral ways, which Paul then lists in vs. 29-31. Thus, their exchange of truth for falsehood results in God's handing them over to an immoral way of living.

They do not attest to the value of having God in their understanding of reality. Therefore, God (as the story goes) grants them permission to have minds that do not attest to the value of knowing Him. As a result, they do not perform actions that are not fitting for human beings to perform.

²⁸ πεπληρωμένους πάσῃ ἀδικίᾳ πονηρίᾳ πλεονεξίᾳ κακίᾳ – Unrighteousness = that which is not moral. Evil = that which is not morally good. πλεονεξία refers to the people doing whatever is necessary in order to perform the evil of their intent, i.e., it is boundless evil. Wickedness = that which is not morally good.

²⁹ μεστοὺς φθόνου φόνου ἔριδος δόλου κακοηθείας, ψιθυριστὰς – Envy = wanting what someone else has when it is clearly not something that God wants a person to have, even if it is something of a non-moral nature. Murder = wanting someone not to exist and even causing them not to exist when it is not our right to do this. Strife = willfully choosing to be in conflict with others instead of pursuing a peaceful and harmonious relationship with them to the extent that it is possible for us. Deceit = misrepresenting the truth so as to lead someone to believe a lie, thinking that they are believing the truth. Wishing harm to others = hoping people suffer and undergo pain when it is not our right either to want this or cause this. Gossips = speaking about someone's misfortune or moral or non-moral shortcomings to others in order to put them down and build ourselves up as better than they are.

³⁰ καταλάλους θεοστυγεῖς ὕβριστὰς ὑπερηφάνους ἀλαζόνας, ἐφευρετὰς κακῶν, γονεῦσιν ἀπειθεῖς – Slanderers = common error that people, who are in an abject state of rebellion against God, make is to consider themselves superior to others, especially those who subscribe to the claim that the Bible is God's inerrant communication to mankind and who proclaim its message to others as best as they can. In addition, the use whatever techniques are available, even making new ones up if they need be, to make others feel less than they are. Naturally, a useful technique is to speak ill of people who believe that the Bible is the truth. God-haters = rejecting God and refusing to humble oneself before Him to obtain His forgiveness or refusing to obey Him and His moral commandments. Arrogant, prideful, and boasters = a person's thinking that he is better, greater, inherently more important, and more valuable than other human beings. Inventors of evil = creative in the way a person rebels against God without repenting and seeking to do what is good. Disobedient to parents = those who start at a young age willfully defying authority and choosing to be selfish and rebellious, putting their desires ahead of everyone else's.

³¹ ἀσυνέτους ἀσυνθέτους ἀστόργους ἀνελεήμονας – Void of understanding = lacking a good understanding of the reality in which they are living, including the reality about both God and themselves within the creation. Agreement-breakers = lacking the willingness to keep an agreement in the manner that they should. And Paul may be thinking mostly of the agreement that God made with the Jews, the Mosaic Covenant, as he heads towards chapter 2 and the religious Jew who thinks he is keeping God's covenant when he is only performing it on an outward and superficial level. But it could be that he is thinking of only agreements and contracts between human beings. Without normal human affection = lacking a basic human ability to be kind and caring towards others, so that, finally, they cannot and do not care for those who are in need, even the need or right to be treated with civility and respect. Unmerciful = unwilling to forgive others for their being hurtful, even while knowing that we all need God's forgiveness. In their arrogance, people can even belittle and slander others to the extent that they are convinced that they deserve God's forgiveness, which is an oxymoron, while others do not (see 2:3). In short, people become worse than animal-like in the midst of their abandonment of the ideas of God to which their minds naturally lead them as they perceive the created cosmos.

³² οἵτινες τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγόντες ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες ἄξιοι θανάτου εἰσίν, οὐ μόνον αὐτὰ ποιοῦσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ συνευδοκοῦσιν τοῖς πράσσουσιν – Paul ends his general description of sinful humanity by stating that, in spite of people's defective thinking about God and morality, they cannot push out of their minds the fact that they are accountable to God and will incur eternal death and destruction because of His justice. It is reasonable to assume that they also realize that eternal life is available from God as His gift. But they reject both their accountability and the gift of life.

In addition, people try to bolster their courage against God by encouraging each other to rebel against Him, thus employing the principle of strength in numbers. People can claim that there is no such thing as morality, but they know they are wrong, just as people can claim they are better than other people and acceptable to God, but they also know they are wrong (see 2:2).

Paul's description here of human beings is a far cry from the common belief that people are basically good and have only the potential for evil. While it is true that most people have figured out that pursuing a certain level of moral goodness will make their lives personally more enjoyable than if they do not, nevertheless, their fundamental desires are oriented towards rejecting

the truth about God and His moral commandments. People really are evil and have only the potential for good. This potential some people try to fulfill at a level that looks acceptable to others and even to God, but it still constitutes rebellion against Him. Even those whom God changes inwardly fulfill this potential to a degree in the present reality. Authentic believers do not become morally perfect in the present realm, but at least they do not completely ignore God and their sin.

³³ Διὸ ἀναπολόγητος εἶ, ὃ ἄνθρωπε πᾶς ὁ κρίνων ἐν ᾧ γὰρ κρίνεις τὸν ἕτερον, σεαυτὸν κατακρίνεις, τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ πράσσεις ὁ κρίνων – After commenting on the immoral condition of humanity in general and its consequences, Paul turns his attention to the individual who tends to think that he is a self-actualized morally acceptable person, that is, acceptable to God—which is the tendency for both Jews and Gentiles, while Paul probably has the Jew mostly in mind. But we all think that we are better than we are and better than others, even while being acceptable to God, if we are willing to admit that there is a God. If we did not think that we are better, then we would genuinely repent of our sin. But this we do only if God has changed our hearts and caused us to do so.

The fact that Paul addresses the self-righteous person with “O Man” (ὃ ἄνθρωπε) and not “O Jew” lends to interpreting this part as Paul’s talking about human beings in general, both Jews and Gentiles, who all know that they are condemned by God for their inherent sinfulness which they are not willing to face into honestly and repent to acquire His mercy.

Paul has already stated this characteristic of self-righteousness that exists in all sinners when he used the words arrogant, prideful, and boastful in 1:30. And this will then permit him to address directly and more explicitly, starting in 2:17, the arrogant, prideful, and boastful Jew, who firmly believes that his being a member of the nation of Israel and his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant make him not only special to God, a good person simply by virtue of his ethnicity, but also worthy of God’s blessings and who considers all Gentiles who are not followers of the Mosaic Covenant to be cursed by God. Thus, the self-righteous Jew rationalizes his lack of mercy and leniency towards Gentiles, i.e., his being ἀνελεήμων, the last word in 1:31. He does not have to be lenient towards people who are not special like him.

Considering that Paul is writing this letter to Gentile Christians in Rome who are soon going to be confronted by both believing and non-believing Jews returning to Rome after an eight year gap in the Jews’ presence in the capital city, he is most likely segueing to this section starting in chapter 2 where he will focus on the Jewish perspective on God because he wants to prepare his readers for conversations that returning Jews to Rome will be having with them. The most extreme case will be the kind of Jew whom he describes in 2:17ff., one who considers himself worthy of God’s mercy and love because he is Jewish and has faithfully obeyed the Mosaic Covenant and who thinks he can assess other people’s moral nature and behavior while he himself is different and acceptable to God. Therefore, he “judges” others without properly and accurately judging himself.

However, Paul will point out that this perspective lacks an accurate self-assessment of the depth of a person’s sin and sinfulness. The person thinks he is better than he is because he is not facing honestly into “the same things” that he is doing—arrogance, pride, envy, wishing harm to others, etc. He overlooks his own sin because of his ethnicity and religious behavior. We typically call this person a self-righteous hypocrite. We also notice that these “same things” for Paul are not always external in their nature. They are choices that people make inside and that may not manifest themselves in an obvious way outside. A person can envy others and come across humble and kind towards them—while ignoring the envy. It is the Spirit of God who makes us aware of our inner sin in the midst of our outer kindness and goodness that falls short of the morality commanded by the Mosaic Covenant. This then should lead to genuine repentance and genuine humility, kindness, and goodness.

In addition, Paul used to be a self-righteous Jew before God arrested him on the road to Damascus. So he knows exactly what he is talking about. He has also encountered this Jewish mentality in his travels around the northern Mediterranean area, and it has been the main reason why he has had to write most of his other letters. Thus, it is how Paul himself was before God changed his heart and made him aware of the depth of his sinfulness. Paul’s claim here is that people who stand in judgment of other sinners and think that they are not committing the same evil acts, either internally or externally, as those around them are wrong. And this leaves self-righteous people defenseless before God at the judgment, even if they as Jews have been “following” the Mosaic Covenant by diligently paying attention to its 613 commandments.

Paul has just listed in 1:28-32 an entire litany of evil and immoral actions that pagan and atheistic human beings perform in their rebellion against God. And he is going to say that even self-righteous Jews, who diligently follow the Mosaic Covenant while ignoring what is really going on inside themselves, commit at least some of these same evil sins against God. Then, in 2:21,22 Paul will state explicitly some of the “very same things” (τὰ...αὐτὰ) that the self-righteous Jew is committing. His purpose is to get the self-righteous Jew to look carefully at his own inward sinfulness and become biblically repentant before God, and not just repentant in a strictly perfunctory manner that is completely unimpressive to God because it lacks the sincerity that He requires. This section regarding the self-righteous hypocrite is in line with Jesus’ exhortations to his Jewish audience in the Sermon on the Mount – **Matthew 7:1** “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. **2** For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. **3** Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **4** Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? **5** You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Paul uses κρίνω 18x in Romans. It means to stand in judgment of another morally capable person and assess the quality of his nature and choices, whether they are good or evil, righteous or unrighteous. κρίμα is the noun, and Paul uses it 6x in Romans. Paul uses κατακρίνω 4x in Romans. It means to condemn after assessing someone’s moral nature and actions. κατάκριμα is the noun, and Paul uses it 4x in Romans.

³⁴ οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν κατὰ ἀλήθειαν ἐπὶ τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντας – Paul switches in this sentence to speak of “the judgment of God” (τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ) in contrast to the judgment of human beings that he mentioned in the previous verse. He says that God’s “judgment” is “according to truth towards those who practice such things” (κατὰ ἀλήθειαν ἐπὶ τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντας). In other words, God’s assessment of sinful human beings is not coming from self-deception and self-delusion to the effect that He is not accurately aware of His own moral condition. Indeed, He and His icon in the world, Jesus of Nazareth, are the only persons who correctly know their moral nature and condition. Therefore, God always assesses human beings’ moral nature and decisions perfectly accurately. This is what Paul means by “according to truth.”

But is this a statement about all human beings who know there is a God and who know they are worthy of death for rejecting the truth about God, etc. according to what Paul says at the end of chapter 1 (see 1:20, 32)? It might seem that the “we” here in v. 2 refers to Paul and only his fellow Jews, as though he is saying, “You and I both know that God is a God of justice and that He will condemn to death anyone who violates His moral commandments.” However, Paul’s statements about mankind in general in chapter 1 that every human being knows that he is not only accountable to God but condemned by God for his rebellion against Him indicate otherwise. Therefore, while thinking primarily about Jews and their self-righteousness (which he participated in before God changed his heart), he is referring to any person, Jew or Gentile, who stands in judgment on others and himself, both of whom are members of the human race who, whether they admit it or not, grasp clearly enough that God is a God of justice, judgment, and condemnation of those who do evil, i.e., of all human beings apart from Jesus.

Thus, every human being, who considers himself morally superior to others, knows also that God’s justice is rightly exercised towards evil people. Indeed, he would want God to judge, condemn, and destroy all those other really evil people. Certainly, the Jew knows this and wants this as both a typical human being and a member of God’s chosen people to whom God gave the Old Testament and its promises (see 3:1-2). In other words, Jews may be aware of this at a conscious level more than Gentiles, because Jews most likely are reading about God’s justice (and mercy) in the Hebrew scriptures on a weekly basis in their synagogues.

³⁵ λογίζη δὲ τοῦτο, ὃ ἄνθρωπε ὁ κρίνων τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντας καὶ ποιῶν αὐτά, ὅτι σὺ ἐκφεύξῃ τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ – Again, the fact that Paul addresses the self-righteous person with “O Man” (ὃ ἄνθρωπε) and not “O Jew” lends to interpreting this part as Paul’s talking about human beings in general, both Jews and Gentiles, who all know that they are condemned by God for their inherent sinfulness which they are not willing to face into honestly and repent to acquire His mercy.

This is definitely a rhetorical question. The answer is obviously a resounding, “Yes.” Self-righteous people, especially Jews who are counting on their ethnically privileged possession and their religious performance of the Mosaic Covenant to make them worthy of God’s mercy and blessings, do think that by their good, moral actions that they will escape God’s judgment and condemnation. Thus, somehow people are able to convince themselves that they do not deserve God’s judgment and condemnation—probably because they are desperate to deny their sinfulness and to avoid the level and kind of humility that is necessary to repent of their sin and accept God’s undeserved grace and mercy.

This is how insidiously stealthy sin is in making a person unwilling to face into the truth of their immoral and sinful condition before God. Both the self-righteous Gentile and the self-righteous Jew, therefore, believe that they are good enough for God to accept them, because they are not committing the same acts as all those other evil people—they think (while ignoring their envy, malice, pride, arrogance, etc.). This is just the nature of basic, human, sinful self-righteousness. And everyone is guilty of it. But being explicitly chosen by God as the chosen people of God and comfortable with one’s level of obedience to God to requirements which God Himself has given him and his fellow Jews, only reveals a person’s self-righteousness and rebellion against God—when his heart has not been changed by God.

³⁶ ἢ τοῦ πλοῦτου τῆς χρηστότητος αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀνοχῆς καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας καταφρονεῖς, ἀγνοῶν ὅτι τὸ χρηστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς μετάνοιάν σε ἄγει – This, too, is a rhetorical question. The obvious answer is, “Yes.” The self-righteous person who is blind to the depth of his own sin is also conveniently blind to God’s kindness and ignores it and His patience and long-suffering by thinking that he is worthy of His mercy and forgiveness because of his good, moral actions. While either ignoring God or thinking He accepts them on the basis of their good behavior, people refuse to come to grips with their sin and God’s profound kindness and patience whereby He forgives sin regardless of how many they have piled up in their individual lives and how heinous and evil they have been.

Two options for His kindness –

1) Their sin is so deep that only God’s active kindness through the inner work of His Spirit can actually cause them to repent (see 2:28,29)

2) Paul repeats only the first word of the three in the previous clause and is asking if they really do not grasp the fact that all this time that God is taking to finish His project of bringing about the Kingdom of God should lead all sinners to repent and seek God’s mercy.

The second option is probably correct and in line with not only the other two words, “patience” and “longsuffering,” but also Paul’s statement in [Romans 9:22](#) “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience (ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ) vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (σκευῆ ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπόλειαν).” The word “patience” is the same as here in 2:4. We must appreciate just how kind and patient God is with the entire sinful human race such that He has not yet brought the present age to an end and destroyed all those who have remained committed to disobeying Him throughout their entire lives. In other words, God’s patience and the length of both human history and Jewish history is not because the Jews are so righteous that they deserve long life from Him, but because He is granting time

and opportunity to repent of their sin and become saved from His condemnation and destruction.

There are certainly moments when those of us who understand God's purpose to bring about the Kingdom of God long for Him to end this age and its plethora of evil, but we must keep reminding ourselves that He is being patient with both the Jews and the Gentiles, giving them time to repent and escape His wrath, condemnation, and eternal death.

Therefore, by focusing on his self-deceiving supposed moral superiority, the self-righteous person hides from not only his own sin but also the wealth of God's goodness, patience, and longsuffering, so that the words "not realizing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance" have the sense of "not realizing that the kindness of God *ought to lead* you to repentance." The key idea in what Paul is saying is God's patience. History is continuing along as it is with as much evil and wickedness in the world, not because God is really into evil, but because He is really, really patient and longsuffering. And it His tremendous patience that truly ought to convince people that they should repent of their sin and embrace His forgiveness and offer of eternal life.

Basically, the self-deceiving and morally superior thinking sinner is ignoring history and its length with the quantity of evil within it, while he also ignores the important quality of God's patience that He is using to wait for people to acknowledge humbly their sinfulness and to appeal to Him for mercy.

Soon in 2:28,29 Paul will declare that the Spirit of God is the only one who causes the necessary inward change and condition for acquiring God's mercy, so that ultimately the Holy Spirit encapsulates the active operation of God's goodness in people's hearts (also see Romans 5:5 to the effect that "God's love has been poured out in our hearts in the manner of the Holy Spirit who was given to us"). But here Paul wants the self-righteous person to focus on God's willingness to wait in order to give sinners time to repent. He does not rush into Jesus' return and then the final judgment. Indeed, we are still waiting for the latter after Jesus' return and he restores the Kingdom of Israel during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. And yet we have to understand and accept this truth in the light of God's being the one who is telling His story exactly as He wants. In other words, this is a planned patience, not an unplanned one, in the midst of God's handing people over to the cravings of the evil hearts to do that which is contrary to His moral commandments.

³⁷ κατὰ δὲ τὴν σκληρότητα σου καὶ ἀμετανόητον καρδίαν θησαυρίζεις σεαυτῷ ὀργὴν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὀργῆς καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως δικαιοκρισίας τοῦ θεοῦ – Yet, in the midst of God's patience and waiting, the self-righteous person must come to grips with the outcome of their lives—God's wrath. Paul is placing the problem of people's not repenting squarely on their own shoulders. They are choosing to remain self-righteous and unwilling to acknowledge their sinfulness to the extent that it exists in order to resent appropriately and escape God's condemnation.

As a result, probably much to the surprise of all self-righteous people (except they really do know this), Paul is saying that they will incur God's anger and justice, not His mercy and love, at the future "day of wrath and the revealing of God's righteous judgment." This follows directly from the willful blindness that self-righteous people engage in, because their self-righteousness, even religious, Jewish self-righteousness while following the Mosaic Covenant, is simply another form of human beings' expressing their evil, just like the various examples of evil Paul provides at the end of chapter 1—envy, murder, strife, deceit, etc. By willfully refusing to acknowledge his own sinful inwardness, the self-righteous person is only storing up God's anger for himself that will be vented on him when God makes it clear to all human beings that He has been waiting patiently for them to repent and finally judges them—as Paul indicates in Romans 9:22 and John describes in a vision at the end of Revelation 20. Like all the rest of humanity, i.e., pagan Gentiles whom Paul described at the end of chapter 1, self-righteous people of Romans 2, including self-righteous Jews, are refusing to come to grips with the obvious fact, even to them, that they deserve and will incur God's wrath, justice, and condemnation—in spite of actually knowing this at an intellectual level that renders them without a defense at the final judgment. No one will be able to say that he did not know enough to be able to avoid God's eternal condemnation and destruction. God has implanted knowledge of His moral requirements and impending judgment in every human being. They simply need to face into this truth, repent, and embrace God's eternal mercy and promise of eternal life.

³⁸ ὃς ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ – The very simple fact, as Paul expresses here, is that God will judge each human being on the basis of what he has done, and this involves both his inwardness and his outwardness.

Psalms 62:12, And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to his work (תְּשַׁלֵּם לְאִישׁ כְּמַעְשָׁיו) (ὅτι σὺ ἀποδώσεις ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ).

And, as Paul said at the end of chapter 1, every human being knows this, that he will face God's judgment and receive either His condemnation and destruction, if he was unwilling to seek God's truth and include His mercy in his understanding of the human moral condition, or His mercy and life if he repented and pursued belief and obedience to Him (see Ezekiel 18, 33).

Even though Paul uses the word for "pay back" (ἀποδώσει) with respect to the two kinds of responses to human beings that God will make at the final judgment, he does not mean that those who are rescued from God's condemnation actually earn this salvation. The entire Bible is filled with the fact that God graces and gives such a response to people, because the only response that sinful human beings can earn is His eternal condemnation and the only response they can make to God comes from their innate sinfulness and is therefore sin. Therefore, this word ἀποδώσει refers to God's responding to sinful human beings as a result of the quality of their hearts, not to the fact that they earn either His mercy or His condemnation. God graces His mercy to some sinful human beings (because of their changed hearts), and He recompenses with eternal destruction other human beings who deserve such because of their sinfulness (and because of their unchanged hearts).

Therefore, "the deeds" (τὰ ἔργα) here are different from the "works of the Covenant" (ἔργων νόμου) in 3:20, where Paul is referring to the Jewish mentality of obeying the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant while expecting to please God

sufficiently and make oneself worthy of His blessings of the great nation of Israel and eternal life. These “deeds” are of either a changed heart quality or unchanged quality, while the latter are “works” of an unchanged heart quality.

³⁹ τοῖς μὲν καθ’ ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν ζῶην αἰώνιον – Now, Paul spells out the specifics of God’s judgment criteria. On the one hand, if a human being has genuinely pursued doing what is biblically and morally good that will result in the greatest level of well-being, the glory of being morally perfect, the honor of being received by God into His eternal kingdom, and the divine gift of an existence that never decays and dies, then he will obtain eternal life. In other words, by using the word “seek” (ζητοῦσιν), Paul is pointing to a human being’s inwardness constituted by his heart and fundamental desires. If a person genuinely desires and actively pursues goodness now that he wants to result in moral perfection later, then God will fulfill this desire and grace it to him as part of what is his “salvation.” In addition, the implied concept here regarding salvation is God’s grace, i.e., that God gives salvation to the person who genuinely seeks goodness and who, in no way, deserves, even though Paul just said that God will pay back each man according to his deeds (ὃς ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ). In the case of the person who obtains salvation, the “pay back” is never on the basis of his deserving it, while, in the case of the person who suffers God’s anger and destruction, it is definitely because he deserves them. Thus, we see that Paul has no problem using language that normally involves the concept of being worthy of something, and, yet, Paul is talking also about God’s grace where the recipient deserves the exact opposite of what he gets.

⁴⁰ τοῖς δὲ ἐξ ἐπιθείας καὶ ἀπειθοῦσι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθομένοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ ὄργη καὶ θυμός – On the other hand, if any human being has rejected the biblical truth and that of his own “conscience” and innate understanding of reality that God has given every human (as Paul described in chapter 1 and 2:1-2), so that this person has an insatiable desire to be contentious, to argue with God about what is right and what is wrong, and is unwilling to accept God’s definition of morality, then God will recompense him with an angry response that will also result in eternal condemnation and death.

⁴¹ θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν. Ἰουδαίου τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνοσ – The result of God’s wrath and anger in judgment of those who disobey Him will be what Paul calls affliction and anguish. These refer to the measured punishment that each unbelieving sinner will receive. But in this verse Paul does not mention complete destruction, which he will three verses later in **Romans 2:12** Consequently, those who sin outside the Covenant will indeed suffer destruction (ἀπολοῦνται) outside the Covenant, and those who sin in the midst of the Covenant will also be judged through the Covenant. He will mention it as well in **Romans 9:22** What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for **destruction** (σκευὴ ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπόλειαν).

Here in 2:9 Paul wants to highlight that people who do not repent of their sin and seek God’s mercy and immortality deserve His punishment, which they will not be able to avoid.

And Paul states straightforwardly that the ethnic affiliation of a human being is irrelevant to God when He judges everyone. The Jew who pursues evil on the basis of his sinfulness will encounter God’s condemnation that is characterized by agonizing punishment just as easily and as much as the Gentile who does the same.

Paul does mention though that there is a position that the Jew holds in human history that is considered above that of any Gentile. It was Abraham and his physical descendants, the Jews, to whom God gave specific and unique promises of His giving them the land of Israel, many descendants to live on the land, and the existence as a “great nation” in the world (see Genesis 12:1-3). God also made a particular agreement with only them that was supposed to result in their demonstrating their unique position by following the instructions and commandments of the Mosaic Covenant (see Exodus-Deuteronomy). Thus, in a sense, the Jew is “first” in line to receive God’s blessings, as Paul intimates in Romans 2:10, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” However, we see in v. 9 that the Jew is also “first” in line to receive God’s wrath and eternal condemnation, revealing the fact that ultimately there is no *eternal* favoritism towards the Jews by their being the earthly chosen people of God in human history to demonstrate explicitly through their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant this choice by God. Yet, we also know that when God brings about the restored Kingdom of Israel, He will grant to all the Jews hearts of authentic belief and obedience while they live on the land of Israel during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20.

In the next paragraph, Romans 2:11-16, Paul will describe further the impartial nature of God’s judgment towards sinners in order to indicate that Gentiles can pursue proper, biblical morality even if they have never heard the Mosaic Covenant.

⁴² δόξα δὲ καὶ τιμὴ καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν. Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι – Likewise, the Jew who genuinely pursues morality in opposition to his innate sinfulness will obtain the honorable distinction of becoming morally perfect in the eternal Kingdom of God just as easily and as much as the Gentile who does the same.

Therefore, Paul must be referring to a different kind of goodness than that of the self-righteous Jew who is looking strictly at his following the Mosaic Covenant from his own human ability as the means to making himself worthy of God’s love and acceptance at the judgment. Instead, Paul is referring to a good inwardness that is divinely caused by God and can exist in both Jews and Gentiles *apart from the Mosaic Covenant*. And this good inwardness is in conjunction with external actions of goodness in line with the biblical commandments regarding love for one’s fellow Christian and fellow man.

⁴³ οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ – When it comes to the judgment, the Jews have no advantage before God, which would come as a great surprise to them when it is clear from the OT that God chose them to be His special people within human

history via the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. He has promised that they be the “great nation” who teach the rest of humanity about Him.

But the message of Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish Messiah is not about how all human beings can become Jews in order to please God, but how they can become saved and rescued from God’s eternal condemnation apart from being Jewish, i.e., by become changed on the inside, in their hearts, so that they demonstrate authentic belief in God/Jesus and desire in this life to obey His moral commandments more than anything else in this world.

Therefore, Paul is also talking about how people obtain eternal life or eternal destruction. The bottom line for him in what he has been saying about God’s judgment is that God is not partial to any particular ethnic group. He has made the Jews a peculiar people who are to reflect His moral character and existence that are outside and separate from the created reality, not to make it easier for them to obtain His mercy at the final judgment simply by being His chosen people. Thus, God will judge each individual Jew in the same manner as He judges each individual Gentile, much to the surprise of the Jews. The criteria, which Paul spelled out in vs. 7-10, will be applied to both Jews and Gentiles equally—with proper, inward repentance along with proper, biblical pursuit of morality being required of all human beings to obtain eternal life. These are the “deeds” that God will look for in order to “pay back” any individual, Jew or Gentile, with eternal salvation and life.

⁴⁴ Ὅσοι γὰρ ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον, ἀνόμως καὶ ἀπολοῦνται, καὶ ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον, διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται –

The words ἀνόμως and ἐν νόμῳ could refer to either the entire Torah, i.e., the Old Testament, or just the Mosaic Covenant.

Probably just the Covenant is in view here since Paul is comparing the Jews to whom God gave the Mosaic Covenant with the Gentiles who have no obligation to it and who may never have even heard it.

Paul uses the Greek word νόμος (*nomos*) 74 times in Romans. Most English Bibles translate it “Law” as if he is referring to the Mosaic Covenant. In the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, *nomos* is used to translate the Hebrew word Torah, which literally means “instruction” but can refer broadly to the first five books of the Old Testament or narrowly to the Mosaic Covenant. In Romans, Paul uses it mainly to refer to the Mosaic Covenant (see Romans 2:12ff.) and sometimes to instructions that come either from God, e.g., moral commandments (see Romans 7:22), or from sin (see Romans 7:23). However, I also think that Paul uses *nomos* to refer to the Old Testament Torah in general (see Romans 2:17-20).

With the above in mind, Paul is pointing out that people who have had no direct communication from God that has been written down like the Mosaic Covenant will find themselves under God’s condemnation for their living according to their inherent sinfulness without repenting of it. Paul has already said in 1:18-32 that every human being knows that he is sinful and accountable to God such that he deserves His eternal condemnation (or, as implied, could acquire eternal mercy and life if he were be repentant and pursue goodness). Now he continues this thought by explicitly mentioning the Mosaic Covenant for the sake of emphasizing to the self-righteous Jew that he has the same problem as the self-righteous Gentile. They both are the “O man” of 2:1 & 2:3.

Thus, the specific way that Paul chooses to describe God’s impartial stance at the final judgment for especially the sake of the self-righteous Jew is to say that the Mosaic Covenant is not the sole criterion at the final judgment. Instead, as he has already described, the ultimate criterion is a person’s inward response to his innate and inherent understanding of God and morality that every human being has as described by Paul in chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. At the final judgment, the question will be, has a person willfully chosen to pursue evil in line with this sinfulness, or has he chosen to repent of his evil and pursue authentic goodness (see 2:6-10)? Paul is arguing that this question can be legitimately asked of and answered by Gentiles as well as Jews—apart from the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, the Gentile, who has had no exposure to the Mosaic Covenant can actually come by an authentic pursuit of moral goodness apart from it. The Gentile can also choose to continue to be unwilling to seek and obey God and, as a result, incur His wrath and destruction—without any knowledge of the Mosaic Covenant.

In addition, the Jew, who may think that he is following correctly the Mosaic Covenant, but is actually misusing it to make himself believe that he is a good person who has made himself worthy of God’s blessings, will find himself condemned by God equally with the unbelieving Gentile. And this will be because the Jew is not living up to the standard of the Mosaic Covenant, which is to be an inwardly changed sinner by the Spirit of God (see Deuteronomy 10:16 and Romans 2:28,29).

In one sense, the self-righteous Jew would agree with Paul that lack of obedience to the Covenant results in God’s judgment. But the Jew would say that the only way that he could be condemned by God while following it is if he is not carefully performing all 613 commandments outwardly, i.e., if he is not being a good religious Jew. For him, keeping the whole Covenant is central to receiving God’s blessings. However, Paul means something different by disobedience to the Covenant. Outward disobedience is not the problem. Inward disobedience is. Thus, any human being, even a member of the chosen people of God, a Jew, who is assiduously obeying all the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant outwardly, will be condemned by God for his inward sinfulness if there is not an authentic, biblical, and inward pursuit of submitting to God, regardless of how obedient to God he appears on the outside.

Paul is also saying that certainly the Mosaic Covenant will be used to judge Jews, because God gave them the scriptures and this specific covenant. However, he has been arguing that escaping God’s condemnation is not as easy as paying attention to the Covenant’s 613 commandments and earning God’s salvation. Instead, it involves two much more profound elements—

- 1) honestly coming to grips with one’s deep, deep sinfulness, with the result that a person genuinely cries out to God for mercy and forgiveness, and
- 2) God’s miraculous inward work through His Spirit of moving a person to be genuinely repentant and desirous of eternal moral perfection, which Paul will mention explicitly at the end of chapter 2.

He is also implying that the Mosaic Covenant calls for and exists within the context of these two elements—proper self-

awareness of sin and God's changing people's inwardness.

Deuteronomy 10:16, "So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no more."

Deuteronomy 30:6, "And Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and all your soul, so that you may live."

⁴⁵ οὐ γὰρ οἱ ἄκροαταὶ νόμου δίκαιοι παρὰ τῷ θεῷ, ἀλλ' οἱ ποιηταὶ νόμου δικαιοθήσονται – Again, the religious Jew would certainly not disagree with Paul's statement here. But Paul is implying and will go on to make explicit that it is possible to be properly obedient to God without actually having heard from Him in the manner that the Jews did, who then wrote down God's communications and messages that comprise the Old Testament.

And, as I said, no good, religious Jew would consider himself to be just a "hearer" or listener of the Torah or Mosaic Covenant that God has given specifically to the Jews. Yet, Paul is accusing the religious Jews of being just exactly this, because they are missing the point of the *internal* component of doing the Torah and God's Covenant, as he will go on to explain. Therefore, while religious Jews consider themselves to be *bona fide* "doers" of the Torah and Mosaic Covenant and, therefore, not deserving of God's condemnation, Paul is saying that they are, because they really are only hearers of the Covenant. Their doing is out of their own inherent human sinfulness, not from God's grace and the work of His Spirit within them.

Both the word δίκαιοι and the word δικαιοθήσονται refer to having a relationship with God such that a sinner stands to obtain His forgiveness and eternal life. It is not those who hear the Mosaic Covenant and then focus on its ritual commandments who stand to receive forgiveness and life. It is those who actually do the Covenant, including the moral commandments (inwardly by means of the work of the Spirit of God who changes a person's heart), who obtain eternal forgiveness and life.

⁴⁶ ὅταν γὰρ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν, οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσιν νόμος – The religious Jew who is convinced that only hearing the Mosaic Covenant can cause or allow any human being to obey it properly would never think of what Paul is saying here—that it is possible for Gentiles, who by nature are outside the physical nation of Israel and may have never been exposed to the Mosaic Covenant that God gave the Jews only, to fulfill God's requirements for the Jews (and all other human beings) within the Covenant by appropriately doing the same kinds of things that the Covenant prescribes, i.e., pursuing morality and belief in God *from a changed heart and legitimate inwardness*, this latter part being what Paul will describe more clearly in the next verse and at the end of chapter 2. In other words, Paul is implying that the important aspect of the Mosaic Covenant is not its ritual commandments such as the dietary law and even animal sacrifices at the temple, but its moral commandments that are universal for all mankind.

Thus, Gentiles' inner, divinely given sense of morality becomes a kind of biblical Covenant for Gentiles and that teaches them what to do before God—repent and pursue goodness. This is equal in guiding them and making them feel accountable to God, i.e., equal to the Covenant that God actually gave the Jews and has been written down by Moses. Then, when the Gentiles pursue biblical morality by virtue of God's miraculous inner change of their hearts, they become *bona fide* "doers of the Covenant," even without ever having been exposed to it.

In other words, the double characteristics of knowing biblical morality in their minds and doing biblical morality properly for the ignorant Gentile become as legitimate for obtaining justification and salvation as knowing the Mosaic Covenant and doing it properly for the knowledgeable Jew. And this is because these both happen correctly and substantially for any sinful human by means of the inner work of the Spirit of God.

⁴⁷ οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, συμμαρτυροῦσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων – Paul mentions this very important concept, that he will also comment on at the end of chapter 2, i.e., God's work within a sinful human being, that he has been implying all along as a necessary criterion for escaping God's eternal condemnation.

In a sense, God writes His "Covenant," i.e., His requirements for eternal life, on the Gentile's heart, which is to say that God changes this person's heart so that he authentically faces into his sinfulness. In this way, he becomes a repentant believer in God in a proper, biblical manner. The inward change that God produces results in the person's recognizing the importance of genuine, divinely defined morality within a biblical context. It also allows him to observe his own sinfulness accurately, i.e., as something so evil that he knows he deserves God's eternal condemnation, and to observe his repentance and humility before God accurately. Thus, on the one hand, his thoughts accuse him as he contemplates his sinfulness, while, on the other hand, his thoughts defend him as he appeals to God for mercy with authentic belief and pursues goodness. Paul will use this same idea in Romans 6 & 7 to describe the process that he himself (and any authentic Christian) went through and continues to experience as someone who now encounters the commandments of the Covenant and wrestles with his pursuing morality in the midst of his sinfulness.

Paul is saying that a person can feel good about being repentant and humbly seeking God's eternal forgiveness and mercy. This then is what is required for anyone to be a "doer of the Covenant" (v. 13). He must be inwardly changed, so that he can properly acknowledge his own sinfulness, which, in turn, will lead him to avoid any kind of pride, arrogance, and bragging in the midst of all his fellow human beings who are just like him and who equally need God to change them if they are going to escape His eternal condemnation. Thus, this "Covenant written on their hearts" prevents them from thinking of themselves as superior before God and from being arrogant and unmerciful towards other human beings (see Romans 1:30,31).

⁴⁸ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὅτε κρίνει ὁ θεὸς τὰ κρυπτὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου διὰ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ – The most important time for a human being to be declared uncondemned (see v. 13) is at the final judgment, which is described by other passages as

the return of Jesus the Messiah to destroy the Man of Lawlessness and to set up his messianic government in Jerusalem (see 1 Thessalonians 4,5; 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation; Daniel 11; etc.) and The Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the millennial kingdom according to Revelation 20. The result of a Gentile's inward change by God will be not only his "doing the Covenant" in this life, but being rescued from God's eternal condemnation at the judgment when Jesus returns as the Messiah and intercedes on behalf of all believers, including Gentile believers (see John 5).

Paul ends this paragraph with the statement that this is the gospel which he has learned through the scriptures that pertains to Jesus as the Messiah, that both Jews and Gentiles acquire God's eternal mercy and gift of life by satisfying the condition of being inwardly changed in view of Jesus' being the Messiah who appeals to God on their behalf because of his having offered himself as a propitiation to God (see Romans 3:21-26).

⁴⁹ Εἰ δὲ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ἐπονομάζη καὶ ἐπαναπαύῃ νόμῳ καὶ καυχᾶσαι ἐν θεῷ – Even though "there is no favoritism with God," so that both Jews and Gentiles are judged fairly and equitably by God, i.e., equally by their inner desires, the Jews tend to think that they are morally superior to Gentiles by virtue of the study and performing Torah. Therefore, Paul now fully turns his attention to the Jew who misperceives himself and his standing before God, while also having all the intellectual tools from God's written communication to realize his error. This Jew considers himself—

- 1) securely in good standing before God because of his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and the rest of OT, and
- 2) he brags about his good standing before God and God's making the right decision to choose the Jews as His people.

In 5:1-11, Paul will include "boasting in God" as a definite, existential outcome of genuine belief. Thus, he is showing that bragging about the right thing, i.e., God, is valid only if a person has true, biblical inwardness (see Romans 8:28,29), which is why simply boasting in God as an outward reality does not necessarily mean that a person is doing so from genuine, God-given inwardness.

Certainly it is true that God chose the nation of Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, to play a special role within human history by teaching the Gentiles about God, but they were never and will never be morally superior to the Gentiles in spite of their study and performance of Torah and the Mosaic Covenant. And they would realize this if they each had a changed inwardness and heart, which will finally occur when Jesus returns.

⁵⁰ καὶ γινώσκεις τὸ θέλημα καὶ δοκιμάζεις τὰ διαφέροντα κατηχούμενος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου – The Jew who misunderstands himself also—

- 1) has nevertheless accurately learned certain truths from the Bible, that the Mosaic Covenant and Torah are the right place for the Jew to find the truth of what he ought to do, that God has chosen the Jews and is the Jew's ultimate source of life, that the Mosaic Covenant includes moral commandments that the Jew must acknowledge and follow, and
- 2) that he even recognizes and "approves" of the fact that the whole Torah explains what really matters to God about the created reality.

However, as with boasting in God (see above footnote), being an avid student of the Bible and being able to comment on its contents does not necessarily mean that a person is properly oriented towards God. There must be genuine inwardness that results in belief, faith, repentance, and pursuit of goodness and obedience from a changed heart.

⁵¹ πέποιθᾶς τε σεαυτὸν ὀδηγὸν εἶναι τυφλῶν, φῶς τῶν ἐν σκότει – The intellectual understanding of the Torah and Mosaic Covenant (without it adequately affecting his moral understanding and the uncontrollable depth of his sin) that the learned Jew has acquired leads him to think that—

- 1) he can properly guide people, his fellow Jews and Gentiles, who are currently spiritually blind, towards God and eternal life, and that
- 2) he can be a genuine "light" of moral and biblical truth to those who are blind to their moral deficiencies and need to change the way they live their lives.

The bottom line is that this Jew thinks that he can bring a high degree of enlightenment to those who exist in their intellectual darkness because of their lack of understanding the Bible, thus being really helpful to all other human beings. He thus considers himself superior both morally and intellectually to especially the Gentiles, because he believes that he is properly obeying God according to the Covenant.

⁵² παιδευτὴν ἀφρόνων, διδάσκαλον νηπίων, ἔχοντα τὴν μόρφωσιν τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐν τῷ νόμῳ – Paul continues the list of qualities that mark the self-righteous, educated Jew. He thinks that—

- 1) he can also instruct those who are living their lives foolishly in comparison to how wise people should be living because they really understand the Bible,
- 2) as well as instructing those who lack intellectual and spiritual maturity with respect to the biblical message, who childishly are ignoring God while knowing that he exists and is holding them accountable for their moral choices, because, very simply, the biblically literate Jew believes that he has learned real truth from the Torah and Bible, which he certainly has.

The fact that the Mosaic Covenant within the Torah provides human beings with the knowledge of morality and sin is an important concept in this letter of Romans—right up to the point where the commandment not to "covet," i.e., to crave overwhelmingly something that either a person cannot have or should not have, became the key for Paul himself in learning about the educational value of the Covenant in light of the humanly insoluble problem of his enslavement to sin (as described by Paul at the end of Romans 7).

But for Paul before God changed his heart and for the self-righteous Jew to whom Paul is addressing himself here in chapter 2, after learning about righteousness from the Mosaic Covenant, this Jew (and Paul before him) considers himself to be wise and capable of teaching others who lack truth. However, he is not connecting the dots of the truth properly so as to see both God and himself accurately. Paul will go on to talk about this in the next verses.

And Paul's apostolic assumption is that the Jew is rejecting an accurate understanding of biblical truth because he is willfully doing so in the same rebellious manner as the pagan Gentile who worships false gods or the self-righteous Gentile who seems to be acknowledging the one, true God (see chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2). This means that the Torah educated Jew is guilty of just as much "ungodliness" and "unrighteousness" as the Gentile who suppresses the truth with his unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). This is how

⁵³ ὁ οὖν διδάσκων ἕτερον σεαυτὸν οὐ διδάσκει; ὁ κηρύσσων μὴ κλέπτειν κλέπτεις – Going back to the first statement that Paul made in 2:1 to the effect that self-righteous people are committing the same acts of disobedience against God as the rest of sinful humanity, in vs. 21 & 22 Paul explicitly describes the ways that Jews, who are actually diligent in their study and obedience of the Torah and Mosaic Covenant, are, instead, disobeying God.

There are two options for what Paul is talking about in vs. 21-24—

1) The Jews are obeying God outwardly according to both the moral and the ritual commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, but they lack proper inwardness and a changed heart by the Spirit of God.

2) The Jews are obeying God outwardly according to only the ritual commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, but they are clearly disobeying God in their outward moral behavior.

Because Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5 in v. 24, which is a reference to the Gentiles' nations of especially Assyria and Babylon who mock God's name because they conquer the people who claim to worship Him through their obedience to the ritual commandments of the Mosaic Covenant while acting immorally according to its moral commandments, I think that #2 is the correct interpretation. In other words, people can look very godly and obedience by means of their religious system that is mostly outward ritual observances while rationalizing their immoral behavior.

For example, they are probably being dishonest in their financial interactions with people and rationalizing stealing from them.

Consequently, the Jews are not really listening to what they are saying as they teach other Jews and the Gentiles. And, even more, they are not really listening to what the Torah is saying, because it requires that an obedient person pay attention to both the ritual commandments and the moral commandments—and this with a changed heart besides.

Deuteronomy 10:16, "So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer." The point in this verse is that a person can outwardly obey all the commandments of God, both moral and ritual, and yet be disobedient to God because of a lack of changed and authentic, biblical inwardness.

But the Jews of Isaiah 52 were not only lacking changed hearts but also a commitment to both the moral and the ritual commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. And it will be the tenth commandment that truly hits home by referring to the inward cravings of sinful human beings, so that, even if he is not physically stealing things from people, he certainly is craving what he does not have or should not have.

See Romans 7 and Paul's description of his own inward experience once the Spirit of God began working within him to change his spiritual orientation and he transitioned from being an arrogant, self-righteous Jew to a humble, authentically repentant Jew.

⁵⁴ ὁ λέγων μὴ μοιχεύειν μοιχεύεις; ὁ βδελυσσόμενος τὰ εἰδῶλα ἱεροσυλεῖς – In the midst of his ritual obedience, this observant Jew is also somehow committing adultery in his interactions with other people, and he must also be ignoring the sexual cravings in his heart for women who are not his wife. Therefore, he is committing adultery both outwardly and inwardly, so that he is not aware of the whole problem of his sinfulness.

Three options for "abhorring idols and robbing temples" –

1) The same inward issue would be true of a Jew who found what he thinks is a legal way to keep from paying the temple tax and supporting the Levitical priesthood in full. He is robbing the temple of its covenantal revenue and violating God's commandments.

2) This is a metaphorical statement about the Jew's supposed commitment to avoid idolatry, which Paul has already described as a worshiping of the creation. By thinking that he is good enough through his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant to earn God's blessings and mercy, the Jew is actually made of himself an idol. He is worshiping the creation—himself!! Thus, it is though he is the worst of temple robbers, stealing and using idols, and the one specific idol, himself, to avoid facing into the truth of his own sinfulness and need for God's grace apart from anything he can do to earn it. Therefore, he is no better than a pagan idolator, because he is worshiping the wrong God, i.e., not the God of the Bible whose grace, mercy, and life cannot be earned by a sinful human being.

3) The Jew says that he hates the idolatry of the pagans because they worship the creation, while he is covetous of things in this world, especially the wealth of the precious metals that were used to make pagan idols, gold and silver. There were probably criminals who robbed pagan temples and stole the gold and silver idols for their valuable metals, which they could sell right back to the idol makers. Thus, the Jew is no less interested in the things of the world to fulfill him than the pagans, while he considers himself better than the Gentle pagan and an accurate follower of the Mosaic Covenant. Besides, because God does promise financial blessing to the nation of Israel for their obedience to this Covenant, it would be hard for the individual Jew not to think that pursuing wealth and obtaining it (even illegally and immorally by being dishonest in his financial interactions with other people) is what the Covenant commands and promises.

This third interpretation refers to both outward “robbing” and inward “inward” robbing, which is in line with Paul’s statement in [Ephesians 5:5](#) For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an **idolater**, (ἢ πλεονέκτης, ὃ ἐστὶν εἰδωλολάτρης) has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Compare πλεονέκτης with **πλεονεξία** of [Ephesians 5:3](#) But immorality or any impurity or greed (**πλεονεξία**) must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Again, the issue for this Jew is his apparent obedience to the Mosaic Covenant by paying close attention to the ritual commandments while giving a nod to the moral commandments but rationalizing disobeying them because his inward cravings are overwhelming his conscience and too strong to resist.

⁵⁵ ὃς ἐν νόμῳ καυχᾶσαι, διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου τὸν θεὸν ἀτιμάζεις – Paul thus identifies the condition of the Jew who lacks changed inwardness and who is rationalizing his immoral behavior to be dishonoring to God, even while he believes that he is granting the proper respect and worship to God with his outward ritual obedience and supposed commitment to the Torah and Mosaic Covenant.

He is unwilling to recognize that his life is an explicit violation of the Mosaic Covenant even while he teaches others what the Covenant supposedly requires. This is how self-deceived he is.

⁵⁶ τὸ γὰρ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ δι’ ὑμᾶς βλασφημεῖται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καθὼς γέγραπται – Paul is saying that, by the Jew’s misunderstanding the message of the Mosaic Covenant, so that he rejects or at least misses the idea that he lacks proper inwardness and commitment to its moral commandments, he actually is treating disrespectfully the nature, plans, and purposes of God in the midst of all the surrounding Gentile nations. The observant Jew thinks that he is constantly sending a clear message of devotion and worship of God to all Gentiles, e.g., in Rome when many of them will soon return, but instead he is completely misrepresenting God, to his own detriment with respect to his eternal destiny and to the detriment of God’s reputation among the unbelieving Gentile community. In other words, the extent to which the Jews misrepresent God at any time in history (and to the extent that any “Christian” egregiously misrepresents God in a similar manner), the Gentiles also feel free to treat God disrespectfully, because they are not being made to face into the exact reality of who God is. It is as though the Gentiles have the excuse to ignore or reject God when the Jew, who is a member of God’s chosen people, does the same by not taking the Mosaic Covenant seriously and by not paying close enough attention to his sinfulness and the moral commandments of the Covenant. Isaiah 52:5 – (LXX), δι’ ὑμᾶς διὰ παντὸς τὸ ὄνομά μου βλασφημεῖται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. The Hebrew says, “Those who rule over them lament/howl/rejoice (יִלְלִי וְיִבְכֶּה וְיִשְׂמַח) (יִלְלִי), and my name is treated disrespectfully all day long.”

God speaks through Isaiah to the Jews of the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., who have been disobeying the Covenant, *even while claiming that they are obeying the Covenant*, leading to their being conquered by the Assyrians and eventually by the Babylonians. The Hebrew word יִלְלִי וְיִבְכֶּה וְיִשְׂמַח seems best to translate as rejoice (not howl, as if with pain). Because of the Jews’ disobedience, the Assyrians have conquered them and rejoice over taking them captive and being able to claim that they and their gods are greater than the Jews and their God, Yahweh, thus causing God’s name (all that He is about) to be treated disrespectfully among the Gentiles. As a result, God is not happy with either the immorality of the Jews or with the enjoyment of the Gentiles at the expense of His reputation and His chosen people.

⁵⁷ Περιτομή μὲν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἐὰν νόμον πράσσης· ἐὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς, ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν – Paul is saying here that “circumcision” becomes a “valuable” means of revealing and manifesting the Jew’s proper inwardness as part of what it means for him to believe God for His promises. But if the Jew lacks divinely changed inwardness and is, therefore, a “transgressor of the Covenant” who is not keeping its moral commandments as he described in vs. 21-24, while being particularly focused on its ritual commandments, which is typical of people without changed hearts, then he might as well not be circumcised, regardless of how much emphasis he places on this outward ritual for the purpose of obeying the Torah.

God first established male circumcision as the mark of His chosen people during His making the covenant with Abraham, five hundred years before the Mosaic Covenant, in Genesis 17:9-11—

[Genesis 17:9](#) God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. **10** This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. **11** And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.”

Consequently, in the minds of the Jews, circumcision became the singular and most important act indicating that they were properly obeying God’s Torah in order to receive His blessings. Then, they simply continued in their Torah obedience by diligently paying attention to the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. But, again, it was circumcision that most importantly revealed, literally, that they were the chosen people of God and were serious about their following His commandments, and all His commandments that comprised the Mosaic Covenant.

As a result, Paul admits that it is entirely appropriate for Jews to obey the commandment of circumcision just as much as all the other commandments of the Covenant. Thus, circumcision is a covenantal obligation for Abraham and his physical descendants. Indeed, if they follow this commandment and they follow the Mosaic Covenant with proper “practice” (πράσσης), they will be acceptable to God and receive His mercy.

However, the key here is, what does Paul mean by “practice?” The only thing that he can mean is obedience to the Torah with a fundamentally changed heart and authentic belief—like Abraham! Mere outward obedience of God is simply not sufficient in His

eyes, because a lack of proper inwardness renders the outward obedience sheer hypocrisy, i.e., acting out a script that has no basis in a person's fundamental humility and authentic desire to obtain God's mercy. In fact, the Jew might as well explicitly reject God and His commandments completely—like the pagan idolator, because he is disobeying God with this self-deceived mindset whereby he thinks that he is good enough to be acceptable to Him. Plus, the outcome is the same—God's eternal condemnation. Therefore, outward obedience of both the moral commandments and the ritual commandments is “valuable” and worthwhile only if a person has proper inwardness. But a lack of proper inwardness and not taking seriously the moral commandments, as is the case with the educated, self-righteous Jew in this context, causes a person to be “a transgressor of the Covenant,” so that his circumcision is worthless in terms of ingratiating him to God.

⁵⁸ ἔάν οὖν ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσῃ, οὐχ ἡ ἀκροβυστία αὐτοῦ εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθῆσεται – Paul turns the self-righteous Jew's attention to the Gentile, the “uncircumcised man,” who “guards (φυλάσῃ) the requirements of the Covenant,” which most likely means the same thing as “practice the Covenant” for the Jew in the previous verse. It means to obey God with a changed heart and authentic belief, to be fundamentally committed to God, to obtaining His mercy through belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One, and to pursuing biblical morality. If the Gentile obeys the moral commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, then, in spite of his not being physically “circumcised,” he is still obeying the Covenant properly—because the moral commandments are primary and the ritual commandments are very much secondary. And how would the Gentile do this? Either after hearing the instructions of the Covenant and recognizing that he is not obligated to it because God made it with the Jews or as a result of recognizing his own sense of morality that God has given him as a human being made in His image (as stated in Genesis 1).

Except for those in Abraham's immediate care, Gentiles were not and are not required according to Genesis 17 to circumcise themselves. In this sense, they are outside not only the Abrahamic Covenant, but also the Mosaic Covenant. Nevertheless, Paul has been arguing that Gentiles can be “doers of the Covenant” (vs. 13-16) simply by inwardly submitting to their understanding of God that is part of their human design, even when they have never been exposed to the written Old Testament and communications from God (see Romans 2:11-16). Therefore, if a Gentile, who is not marked by outward circumcision as a follower of Yahweh according to both the Abraham and Mosaic Covenants, fundamentally desires, because of his changed heart and inwardness, to be obedient God, so that he actually pursues morality in other areas of his life, including repentance and excluding the ritual commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, of which circumcision is one example, then he is acceptable to God as one of His “chosen people” so to speak. In this way, the Gentile is “guarding” in his heart and mind the same, universal moral commandments that God gave the Jews in the Mosaic Covenant. Instead of being temporally marked with outward circumcision, the Gentile is eternally marked with inward circumcision (see Romans 2:28,29), so that this externally unmarked and humble Gentile is more acceptable to God than an externally marked and arrogant Jew—obviously, much to the surprise of the self-righteous Jew.

In this way, Paul is highlighting the importance of inwardness vs. religious outwardness (see Romans 2:28,29 in regard to the inwardly changed Jew).

Genesis 26:5 because Abraham obeyed Me (אֲנִי...עָבַד) (ὕπήκουσεν...τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς) and kept (קִיְיָ) (καὶ ἐφύλαξεν) My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.

Deuteronomy 11:1 “You shall therefore love Yahweh your God, and always keep (קִיְיָ) (καὶ φυλάξῃ) His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.”

⁵⁹ καὶ κρινεῖ ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου – In this case, Paul is talking about a good and proper “judging” that a human being can do, in contrast to the evil judging that he discussed beginning in v. 1 of chapter 2. This is a humble and accurate assessment of reality, the way things actually are, in regard to the self-righteous Jew who is an observant and learned student of the Bible and who thinks that he can discern accurately the good and evil of a Gentile. Paul says that it is the biblically illiterate and unlearned Gentile, who by his very nature of not being a Jew is not obligated to the law of circumcision but has been inwardly changed through the miracle of God, who can accurately discern the good and evil of the observant and self-righteous Jew, even showing intellectually that the Jew is condemned before God while he, the Gentile, will obtain God's eternal mercy. And this is partly because the Gentile is obeying the Covenant, even though he may have never studied it nor heard of it.

The reason that the Gentile is such a good judge of biblical morality is because he has a divinely changed *inwardness*, which in him as a sinful human being opens his eyes and mind to see exactly what the main point of the Bible is with respect to the requirement that God has placed on all human beings, that they must have a fundamental desire, longing, and inclination for both mercy and morality in order to be pleasing to God and to receive eternal life—regardless of their religious scruples and obedience.

The Jew has the “letter of the Covenant,” meaning that he has looked at the words and learned them to a degree, but he remains a “transgressor of the Covenant,” because he thinks he has made himself good and acceptable to God when, in fact, he is not looking carefully enough at the depth of his sinfulness, which is causing him to remain evil and condemned before God. And the Jew may be willfully violating the moral “letter” of the Covenant as Paul described in vs. 21-24, engaging in immoral behavior while he focusing on the ritual commandments.

⁶⁰ οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαϊός ἐστιν οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή – The logical conclusion of Paul’s argument is that a Jew is not authentically Jewish if he is obedient to God’s commandments in only an outward manner, even if he appears to himself to be adequately obedient to God. This includes, remarkably, external physical circumcision. In fact, the implication is that, theoretically, a Jew could lack circumcision on the outside while having circumcision on the inside, and be more “Jewish” than his fellow Jew who is outwardly circumcised—because it is humility, accurate self-awareness, and divinely caused inward appeal to God for eternal mercy that is what constitutes authentic Jewishness.

And this is the same for any Gentile who will acquire God’s eternal salvation.

⁶¹ ἀλλ’ ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαϊός, καὶ περιτομή καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι, οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ – Here, Paul finally states explicitly what he has been getting at throughout this whole chapter and will argue for throughout the rest of the letter, especially through chapter 8. Authentic Jewishness (and Christianity) comes about only when God causes the individual Jew (or Gentile) to be changed of heart (see Deuteronomy 30:6, “And Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart...so that you may live”), not when his parents circumcise him physically when he is eight days old (see Genesis 17:9-14). And it is the Spirit of God which brings this about.

Paul is arguing that a person’s “spirituality,” which is the effect of the initial and ongoing work of God’s Spirit, is the only authentic “spirituality” as opposed to when people create their own by means of their natural human performance that is based on their natural human ethnicity, i.e., being a descendant of Jacob and therefore of Abraham. In chapter 8, Paul will say that the former involves being “defined by the Spirit,” so that a person is “inwardly inclined toward the things of the Spirit.” He will also say that the latter involves being “defined by ones’ natural-born sinfulness,” so that a person is “inwardly inclined toward the things of their natural-born sinfulness.”

In addition, when a Jew acquires the kind of inwardness in Romans 2:28,29 by the miracle of God, he recognizes that he need no longer be concerned and focused on obtaining praise and admiration for his obedience from other human beings, which is the natural and even immoral tendency of sinful human beings. We all want to be affirmed as good people and great in our achievements by other people. Therefore, our *fundamental* desire as inwardly changed sinners is for God’s approval, and we are *fundamentally* content with only it, regardless of how much a longing for affirmation from people tugs at our hearts.

Therefore, authentic Gentileness, i.e., authentic humanness, also comes only when God causes the Gentile to be changed of heart and to be content with God’s eternal affirmation alone. Thus, each ethnic group, Jews and Gentiles, ends up acquiring a good standing before God by means of the same methodology—authentic belief, repentance, and pursuit of goodness that results from God’s changing a sinful human being’s heart by means of His Spirit, so that he fundamentally desires eternal mercy and moral goodness, along with the perfect environment of the Kingdom of God on the new earth of Revelation 21 on which to enjoy these.

⁶² Τί οὖν τὸ περισσὸν τοῦ Ἰουδαίου ἢ τίς ἡ ὠφέλεια τῆς περιτομῆς – Paul has shown in chapter 2 that, without God’s performing an inward change on a Jew, he is no different from a Gentile and subject to God’s condemnation and destruction, regardless of how much he looks as though he is obeying the written Torah and Mosaic Covenant. He is just as sinful and just as eternally condemnable by God. He may be obeying the ritual commandments of the Covenant, but the fact that he is disobeying the moral commandments and has no changed heart renders him condemned by God just as much as the Gentile who lacks this changed inwardness. In other words, being a member of the nation of Israel by virtue of one’s physical heritage as a Jew does not produce God’s approval and result in His being merciful to the Jew.

Paul has also shown in chapter 2 that a Gentile, by means of this same kind of inward change, can become acceptable and pleasing to God while the Jew is not, even though he is a member of the chosen people of God by virtue of his being a physical descendant of Abraham through Jacob and his following the Mosaic Covenant, at least outwardly. As a result, Paul has made it sound as though there is no advantage to being a Jew, i.e., one of the *chosen* people of God, vs. being a Gentile.

Probably, for the sake of any Jew who might read this letter and think that he has a valid objection to Paul’s theology, or who would want to claim some sort of priority over Gentiles because of the Jews’ prominence in the OT, he asks if there is any advantage to being a Jew? If a Jew cannot become a Jew who is pleasing to God without His inwardly changing him, then is there any benefit to the nation of Israel’s having been *chosen* by God to be His special people and assigned what looks like a special and unique role within human history?

By “circumcision,” Paul is referring to the required ceremony that God stipulates of Abraham and his physical descendants in Genesis 17 whereby the men outwardly mark themselves as His special people. See explanation above in footnote for Romans 2:25.

⁶³ πολὺ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ὅτι ἐπιστεύθησαν τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ – Paul has already made reference to this. In 2:11 Paul started comparing the Gentile, who has never been exposed to the written Torah of the Old Testament to the Jew who has. Now, Paul makes explicit that the truth about God came from God to *only* the Jews, with the implied result that they then wrote it down for their own benefit and the benefit of the rest of mankind. Thus, Paul’s answer to the question in 3:1 is that there is a great advantage to being a Jew—at least in regard to knowledge and understanding of the truth about God. While every human being knows that there is a God and that he is accountable to God (Romans 1), God has communicated to no other group of people besides the Jews the correct ideas about Him and the nature of reality. As a result, it is the Jews, and only the Jews, who have possessed and continue to possess (in written form now, i.e., in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, because the latter’s authors are also Jews, except for Luke) the explicit explanation of God that He wanted not only them and but also all other human beings to have.

In addition, because Paul goes on in v. 3 to wonder if God's "faithfulness" is false on the basis of the Jews' unbelief with respect to His "messages," he is also referring to the promises that God has made to the Jews through the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3—the promises of descendants, of land, of being a great nation, and of eternal life for both Jews and Gentiles of the same kind of belief as Abraham. But it seems that the main advantage of the Jews in Paul's argument here is their possessing God's ideas as direct communications from Him and intended for the instruction of all other human beings.

And based upon the statement that Paul makes in 2 Timothy 3:16 to the effect that the OT (and NT by extrapolation) is the inerrant collection of ideas about God that He Himself ensured were communicated by the human authors of the OT, it is implicit here that Paul is saying that "the messages of God" (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ) that He entrusted to the Jews and that they wrote down in the Old Testament are completely and unerringly true. No other document or set of documents can make this claim. Therefore, while it is always interesting to read what other human beings from other ethnic and people groups have written about reality, their documents will, by definition, possess an element of error, so that they cannot be completely trusted to provide the reader with a good understanding of God and/or the creation. Another implication of the singular inerrancy of the Bible is that even teachers of it, that is, teachers other than the biblical authors whenever they were alive, are never entirely correct in their understanding of the Bible. Consequently, because the only authorities on the nature of reality are the biblical authors, it is the moral obligation of each individual to figure out for himself what is the biblical message. Certainly, this can be done in conversation with others who are seeking to understand the Bible, but no one has the right to say that he is an authority on the Bible such that others should follow his lead as a teacher, pastor, pope, bishop, priest, minister, etc., regardless of how much so called training in Greek, Hebrew, and biblical exegesis he has received either autodidactically or from others, e.g., seminary professors.

Paul is also implying that knowledge and understanding are fundamental elements of what it means to be a human being. Without good and accurate knowledge of God through the Bible, a human being is actually less than human, or at least less a human being than what he can be. In chapter 2, Paul talked about the Jew who has some degree of an intellectual grasp of the Torah and Mosaic Covenant. This Jew is still human, but he is not grasping reality to the extent that he can, because his take on the Torah is incorrect, so incorrect that, along with his rebellious heart, he is damnable by God. It is not the poor knowledge that condemns this Jew, but it is his innate and willful rebellion against God that does. Thus, this Jew is less a human being than what he can be. So we can say that humanness is fundamentally defined by biblical knowledge of God, i.e., knowledge that has come from God via the Jews and the written documents which they have provided themselves and the rest of mankind.

Here in 3:1, Paul calls the Torah and Mosaic Covenant "the messages of God" (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ). Even if the Jew is not observing the Torah properly, he at least *has* the Torah, i.e., the messages and promises of the one, true God that were communicated from God by Moses and other Old Testament authors, so that they were written down and preserved for all mankind and posterity.

In addition, Paul is implying in both chapter 2 and 3:1,2 that human beings make choices on the basis of their knowledge. Therefore, right knowledge *can* lead to the *one* right decision of choosing to believe the biblical truth that will result in God's mercy and salvation from His eternal condemnation and will result in life in the eternal Kingdom of God, *if a sinful human being makes this choice because has been inwardly changed by God*. In contrast, wrong knowledge can be relatively harmless if a person is in fact inwardly changed by God, but it certainly can help lead to the one bad decision to rebel against God and to continue to rebel against God, *if a sinful human being makes this choice because has NOT been inwardly changed by God*. Thus, if a group of people, the Jews, have the correct knowledge and the correct *source* of knowledge about the fundamental issues of reality, the messages of God in the OT (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ), they are at least one concrete, practical step closer to making the right decision than those who lack the explicit and written source of knowledge about the fundamental issues of reality.

Nevertheless, we have seen Paul indicate in 2:14-16 that God can and probably does cause certain Gentiles to adopt a perspective on their sinfulness and the necessity of His mercy apart from this concrete and practical step of being exposed to His messages through the written documents of the Old Testament.

Also, it is impossible to emphasize how important it is for us human beings, especially us sinful human beings, to take advantage of the existence of the Bible and to use it by studying it and learning it to know and understand God, our creator and the author of the story that He wants to tell within the creation.

⁶⁴ τί γάρ; εἰ ἠπίστησάν τινες, μὴ ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ καταργήσῃ – One would think that the very people to whom God entrusted and gave His messages would be the ones who believed them the most, while they encourage the rest of the world, who may for the most part reject the messages, to believe them with the same enthusiasm and purpose for which they believe them. However, there has been a major historical discrepancy. God entrusted what He has wanted to communicate to sinful human beings to the Jews, and unfortunately "some of them have not believed" these messages. So do those who possess the truth have to believe it in order for it to be the truth? Logically, no.

Several options for what Paul means here—

1) Perhaps, the Jews' unbelief is because God is incorrect in the information He gave the Jews, and they have figured this out so that they refused to believe His lies, thus rendering Him and the supposed truth "null and void."

2) Or, maybe the fault of God is that He is a poor judge of character, so that the Jews are just bad people and are never going to believe the truth that He has communicated to them. Still, their unbelief renders God "null and void" because it reveals His flaw of being such a poor judge of character.

3) Or, maybe the fault of God is that He can give people His messages, but He is not faithful enough to both the people and the messages to cause them to believe them and use them properly to teach others, thus rendering Him "null and void" as a

satisfactory provider of good information to the world. He simply cannot be trusted.

#3 seems the most coherent, that there is definitely a character flaw in God and He should not be trusted, followed, believed, or obeyed, especially when He says in His messages that He is a faithful and good God and we should trust Him.

Translating this verse is a bit tricky because of figuring out exactly what Paul means by τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ. The word πίστις is the basic word for faith or belief. The KJV translates the phrase “the faith of God.” The NIV and the Complete Jewish Bible translate it “God’s faithfulness.” The NAS95 translates it similarly as “the faithfulness of God.” Another possible meaning is “that from God which is to be believed.”

But Paul just mentioned that the Jews were entrusted (ἐπιστεύθησαν) with God’s messages to mankind. Therefore, it makes sense to translate τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ as “that which God entrusted to them [the Jews].” And he is asking if the fact that the very people who given the scriptures did not believe them render God and them “null and void.” Why should we believe something that God gave the Jews but which they did not themselves believe? And why should we believe God when He cannot get the people to whom He gave these messages to believe?

These verses of 3-8 reveal how messed up people’s thinking can become because of their sin. Sin is not just willfully violating God’s moral commandments. It is also a ready willingness to abandon rationality and adopt nonsense.

⁶⁵ μὴ γένοιτο γινέσθω δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἀληθής, πᾶς δὲ ἄνθρωπος ψεύστης, καθὼς γέγραπται ὅπως ἂν δικαιωθῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου καὶ νικήσεις ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαί σε – Paul’s answer to the above question is, because it is important always to remind ourselves that God is always the one who speaks the truth while sinful human beings lie about the truth. This is just the way God has set things up in the creation.

Thus, Paul is claiming that the *logia* (messages) of God, the Old Testament, are completely true and therefore inerrant and authoritative for teaching sinners about the one, transcendent Creator of this reality. As a result, it follows that the Old Testament always talks about God as a person of truth and faithfulness to His promises (and threats, i.e., via His justice and judgment). Indeed, the verse that Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4 is King David’s saying that God is perfectly just and right to evaluate both his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah as evil, because David has violated God’s commandments, which is to say that he has disobeyed God’s explicit communications to the Jews via the Torah. But David’s “unbelief” in this situation clearly does not render irrelevant the scriptures, which he is supposed to be upholding as the king of Israel, which in turn does not render God a liar.

The scriptures are still true and God is still true regardless of how disobedient the Jews became or become. Their “unbelief” does not make God a liar. It simply gives Him the opportunity to display His good and accurate judgment of David’s immoral behavior in the midst of His also being a God of mercy who fulfills His promises to the Jews. Therefore, the commandments against murder and adultery are not irrelevant, and God is not a liar. Instead, David has been the “liar” and unbeliever, implying, as Paul says in 3:4, that every human being is a liar in contrast to God.

Paul states unequivocally that it is never God who is the liar. It is man. Therefore, the Jews’ unbelief merely demonstrates their own sinfulness *in the midst of* God’s being a God of truth and the scriptures’ which He entrusted to them being true.

Psalm 51:4b – LXX – ὅπως ἂν δικαιωθῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου καὶ νικήσης ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαί σε. The Hebrew reads, **לְמַעַן תְּצַדֵּק בְּדִבְרֵי הַיְיָ וְתִנְצַח בְּיָדֶיךָ**.

Also, by quoting Psalm 51:4, Paul is implicitly stating that God’s action of judging is fundamental to *ta logia tou theou*, the messages of God of Romans 3:1 that He has given the Jews. Being the One who evaluates all human behavior and recompenses people accordingly is an all-important truth of God that is provided us by the Jews in the OT. And, ironically, His judgment of them during their history becomes exhibit A in demonstrating His truthfulness. In addition, God’s being the final Judge of all human beings factors into the importance of the apostolic message that Paul has been commissioned by God to present to the Gentiles.

⁶⁶ εἰ δὲ ἡ ἀδικία ἡμῶν θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην συνίστησιν. τί ἐροῦμεν; μὴ ἄδικος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐπιφέρων τὴν ὀργὴν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω – In the context, I think it makes the most sense to interpret the word “our” as referring to the Jews, about whom Paul just mentioned where “some of them have not believed.”

As a result, Paul is asking if the Jews’ unrighteousness, i.e., the possessors of the messages of God’s unrighteousness, of not believing the messages of God, so that He manifests the “righteousness” of His justice by responding with judgment and condemnation of each man who is an unbeliever, make God an evil God? Paul will make more explicit the implication of this in v. 7. Does God have the right to become angry with and punish those to whom He gives His messages so as to manifest the glory of His justice? Of course He does. In other words, demonstrating His justice and judgment with anger, condemnation, and punishment *towards His chosen people* does not make Him evil.

If the Jews really are God’s *chosen people*, then should He not cut them some slack and not be so harsh in His judgment of them. After all, He did provide them with the Torah so that they may provide others with the Torah. And if they have the Torah and may be doing at least a half-way decent job of communicating it to the world, then why get so upset with them as they are completely unwilling to do their job—when actually they are completely unwilling to do their job. And the answer is, because God is a bona fide God of justice, and to be otherwise would mean that He is failing to be the good and just God who He is. Thus, it is coherent with the previous verses and the following verses to identify the referent of the personal adjective “our” as the Jews, even though Paul has said in v. 4, “let every man be someone who speaks lies.” Therefore, Paul’s question in v. 5 is basically as I have already said, “If the *Jews’* unbelief and disobedience highlights God’s moral correctness by allowing Him,

whenever He wants, to respond to them with His justice, wrath, and punishment, then is He actually wrong for doing so?” The assumption seems to be that *anything that God’s chosen people* do that reveals a God’s greatness is good, so that He should commend and not condemn the people who thus allow him to reveal his greatness. God should commend the Jews, not punish them, for allowing Him to highlight His justice. But Paul is declaring that this is obviously twisted thinking that fails to appreciate the importance and significance of authentic justice, especially God’s justice.

And Paul has probably heard of Jews (or Gentiles) so desperate to find something invalid in what he is saying about His gospel that emphasizes God’s grace through a crucified Messiah that they have gone so far as to claim that, according to Paul, God would be immoral and unjust for punishing *His chosen people*, who have done such an excellent job of allowing Him to demonstrate His justice.

⁶⁷ μή γένοιτο· ἐπεὶ πῶς κρινεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον – If God lets *His chosen people* off the hook for their unbelief, even though He has commissioned them to possess His messages and to convey them to the “world,” then how could He justly and rightly “judge the world” who, like *His chosen people*, are unwilling to believe His messages? Is it right for God to be unjust towards one group of people, even *His chosen people*, and be just towards another group of people? In other words, is it good and right for Him to be capricious, fickle, and inconsistent—especially morally and legally?

Thus, Paul’s simple response to the distorted question about God’s being unjust by punishing Jews who make justice look good is this is inherent in the very character of God. He can judge the world (and the Jews!) only if He is righteous and not unrighteous towards all human beings, regardless of how special their role might be within human history, which is exactly the case.

⁶⁸ εἰ δὲ ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ ψεύσματι ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, τί ἔτι κάγω ὡς ἀμαρτωλὸς κρίνομαι – Paul goes on to individualize and personalize the last distorted question and its answer. He admits that he is a *bona fide* member of humanity and, therefore, can be categorized as a sinner and liar (see 3:4). So he asks if it really does make sense that he, a sinful liar and individual Jew as one of *God’s chosen people*, be judged and condemned damnable by God, if He so chooses, even though this permits God to show off His incredible glory and greatness by exercising His justice towards him. And the answer, of course, is an unequivocal, Yes!

⁶⁹ καὶ μὴ καθὼς βλασφημούμεθα καὶ καθὼς φασὶν τινες ἡμᾶς λέγειν ὅτι ποιήσωμεν τὰ κακά, ἵνα ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀγαθὰ; ὧν τὸ κρίμα ἔνδικόν ἐστιν – Paul now explicitly mentions that there is an objection to his apostolic message that has been circulating among the people who have at least heard about his proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified Messiah. This objection is actually a distortion of what Paul is saying, that he so highly extols the wrath and condemnation of God that he is (or should be) encouraging people to commit massive amounts of evil in order to highlight these expressions of God. This is similar to the explicit objection to the gospel that Paul will mention in Romans 6:1-14, where the idea is to maximize sin in order to maximize God’s grace.

Paul draws the apt conclusion that if people are this perverse in their thinking about morality, justice, and the message that he is presenting, then they are simply demonstrating their commitment to their own sinfulness, which will naturally incur the condemnation of God that they deserve. Consequently, Paul’s quick response to this objection is basically, “Damn these people.” In other words, their thinking is so far off and distorted that when (and if, i.e., if God does not change their hearts before the final judgment) God does judge them and condemn them eternally, they will be getting only what they deserve.

⁷⁰ Τί οὖν; προεχόμεθα; οὐ πάντως προητiasάμεθα γὰρ Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας πάντας ὑφ’ ἀμαρτίαν εἶναι – Getting back to the fact that the Jews were entrusted with God’s messages (especially the Mosaic Covenant – see 3:19,20), does this give them a leg up on the competition, i.e., the Gentiles, for God’s mercy and eternal life?

It might seem from Paul’s statements in 3:1-8 that the Jews’ *individually* are in first position to receive the ultimate gift from God, eternal mercy and life. In other words, what makes the most sense here is to see Paul as talking about individual Jews and not the whole nation of Israel together. The question that he is asking is whether God’s explicit promises to the Jews through Abraham place each and every Jew individually in the position of being ahead of Gentiles individually to receive God’s grace, mercy, and eternal life? After all, Paul has said in 3:1 that the Jews have the explicit advantage of possessing God’s Torah/Bible that contain His promises. In turn, they are in possession of the written messages of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ in v. 2), because they wrote down what God had said to them. Consequently, is an individual Jew actually better off than any individual Gentile—when it comes to obtaining God’s eternal mercy? Paul is not asking if the Jews as individuals are more moral than the Gentiles. He is asking if they are more likely individually to receive God’s gift of being inwardly changed in order to acquire authentic belief and the result of God’s eternal mercy.

Paul’s answer is to refer the reader to what he has really already said in chapters 1 & 2 to the effect that all human beings are subject to sin and inherent sinfulness, whether the Gentile who is an explicit worshiper of pagan idols or the Jew who is an implicit worshiper of pagan idols (see Romans 1:22 and 2:22). Thus, he says, “Absolutely not (οὐ πάντως).” All human beings are “under sin,” i.e., innately and inherently evil for their disobedience of God, regardless of what intellectual information they have been given by God (or not given) and how much they have learned from this information. Possession of truth and knowledge of truth, whether the truth is innate or written, and even if the truth has been entrusted to one’s own people group, the Jews, does not automatically make any individual person more likely to receive God’s eternal mercy. Paul has made it clear that a person must do something with the truth besides just possessing it in his mind. He must become committed to it for the sake of obtaining God’s eternal forgiveness, and this only happens if God miraculously causes it to happen through the inward work of

His Spirit, and no individual, regardless of his ethnicity, is more likely to receive the miracle of inward change from God than any other individual.

Eventually, in Romans 8 and 9, Paul will talk about God's foreknowledge and predestination of individuals that both become the transcendent basis for any human being's escaping His condemnation and obtaining salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection.

In addition, Paul will go on to explain in other parts of this letter that a changed heart does not make a person more moral either than those without a changed heart. It just orients them inwardly towards the truth in such a way that they humbly embrace what God has communicated—that everyone needs His mercy because of the unavoidable presence of humanly unconquerable evil at a basic and innate level within them. While this new orientation qualifies them to receive God's mercy at the final judgment, they still have to receive His mercy, implying that they are still inherently sinful at a certain level and come by His mercy simply by virtue of His choosing to give it to them through His grace.

⁷¹ καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς – This long quote in Romans 3:10-18 from Psalm 14 allows Paul to use the messages of God, that He has given the Jews, to back up what he has been saying, that everyone is committed to disobeying God and equally damnable by God as a result, whether the person is a member of God's chosen people, the Jews, or a member of the unchosen people of God, the Gentiles. In this way, Paul demonstrates that the written communications of God to the Jews (see Romans 2:11ff), even though David is writing about the Gentiles in Psalm 14, correspond to the unwritten and innate knowledge of every human being. Everyone knows that he is evil and accountable to God for his sin, such that all that he deserves is His eternal condemnation (see Romans 1 and 2).

This also means that every individual is a potential object of God's sovereign mercy, and the promises to the Jews to make of them a great nation do not guarantee that God will act towards each individual Jew with His undeserved mercy any more than God will act towards each individual Gentile. Therefore, anything which is said of a Gentile with respect to his inherent immoral condition is true of a Jew, and vice versa.

⁷² οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ συνίων, οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν –

⁷³ πάντες ἐξέκλιναν ἅμα ἠχρεώθησαν· οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ποιῶν χρηστότητα, οὐκ ἔστιν ἕως ἑνός –

⁷⁴ τάφος ἀνεφωγμένος ὁ λάρυγξ αὐτῶν, ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἔδολιούσαν, ἰὸς ἀσπίδων ὑπὸ τὰ χεῖλη αὐτῶν –

⁷⁵ ὦν τὸ στόμα ἀρᾶς καὶ πικρίας γέμει –

⁷⁶ ὄξεισι οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν ἐκχέει αἷμα –

⁷⁷ σύντριμμα καὶ τάλαιπωρία ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν –

⁷⁸ καὶ ὁδὸν εἰρήνης οὐκ ἔγνωσαν –

⁷⁹ οὐκ ἔστιν φόβος θεοῦ ἀπέναντι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν – Vs. 12-18 are not in the Hebrew Bible and comprise the remaining of one verse, v. 3 of Psalm 13 in the LXX. But they do make the point—that every human being is fundamentally rebellious toward God, whether Jew or Gentile.

Therefore, from an existential perspective, neither a Jew nor a Gentile is more likely to believe in God with authentic faith and belief. All sinful human beings are inherently destined for eternal condemnation and destruction if God does not choose to grant them on an individual basis with His grace, a changed heart, and His mercy and forgiveness.

⁸⁰ οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ, ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῆ καὶ ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ – While God communicated the Mosaic Covenant to only the Jews, it nevertheless speaks to everyone in the world, because Paul has argued in chapters 1 & 2, as well as in 3:9-18, that anything said of a Jew regarding his immoral condition can be said with equal validity of a Gentile, i.e., of all human beings.

Plus, there is an international purpose to the Mosaic Covenant as stated in [Deuteronomy 4:5-8—5](#) “See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as Yahweh my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. **6** So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ **7** For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is Yahweh our God whenever we call on Him? **8** Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”

Therefore, those “who are enclosed within the Covenant” (τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ) must be the whole world (πᾶς ὁ κόσμος), all Jews and all Gentiles in all of human history, especially since David is writing about Gentiles in Psalm 14. And the truth that the Jewish Covenant communicates to and about all mankind is that no one has a legitimate defense for his sinfulness and rebellion before God (“every mouth is shut” (πᾶν στόμα φραγῆ)), and that the whole world, i.e., every human being, is under the judgment and condemnation of God (ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ). This includes, of course, the Jews, who have been given the Mosaic Covenant but who have disobeyed it to the same level of sinfulness and disobedience as the Gentiles (see v. 20 and chapter 2).

⁸¹ διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας – In 2:13 Paul spoke of the “doers of the Torah,” who escape God's eternal condemnation. But “doers” in that context referred to inwardly changed people who obey the Torah appropriately—with authentic biblical belief because of their “circumcised hearts” (see 2:28,29). Here, Paul must mean something else by “deeds of the Covenant,” i.e., actions that a person “does” as his response to

God's commandments in the Mosaic Covenant. The clue to what Paul means is the last part of the sentence, that "recognition of sin/sinfulness happens through the Torah (διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἀμαρτίας)." Therefore, these "deeds of the Covenant" must be actions that people, i.e., Jews, perform and do, both by looking at the Torah and its instructions within the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews and without their properly acknowledging their sinfulness. In other words, these people are actually ignoring the teaching of the Torah, e.g., Psalm 14, while claiming to obey the Torah. The teaching of the Torah that they are missing is that every human being is so thoroughly sinful that he lacks what it takes in and of himself to qualify for God's eternal mercy and blessings. Therefore, any attempt by a human being, using only his innate moral (really, immoral!) condition in the midst of his natural human performance, to obey God through the Mosaic Covenant (or any other religious system), i.e., his "flesh" (σὰρξ), is worthless. All that his own religious and moral efforts will get him is God's condemnation and eternal death.

It is therefore very likely that Paul is using the word σὰρξ not just to be a human being, but a human being who is "under sin" and enslaved to sin according to 3:9. As a result, no sinful person can take the Mosaic Covenant and attempt to live according to its commandments in order to please God sufficiently to receive His mercy and the promises of the land of Israel and eternal life. His sinfulness will simply not be moral enough to please God. Consequently, sinful people are rebels against God in the midst of their "deeds of the Covenant," which means that they are counting on their supposed obedience to God's written communications in the Old Testament to gain them God's mercy, blessings, and promises. As Paul will go on in chapter 4 to state explicitly, they expect to get paid for their obedience, which means that they consider their obedience to be worthy of God's mercy and blessings. With their obedience to God, they are counting on earning God's promises to demonstrate His faithfulness to the Jews. This phrase, "by virtue of deeds of the Covenant (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου)," will continue to figure prominently in Paul's argument. He has already spoken in chapter 2 of the Jew who believes that, on the basis of his outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant as a member of the chosen people of God, he is a good person who is acceptable and pleasing to God. However, Paul has also explained that this Jew is just as condemned as the Gentile who has never heard of the Torah, because both the Jew and the Gentile lack changed inwardness, that, as Paul mentions in this verse, should lead a person to recognize his sinfulness as he confronts the teaching of the Torah and the Mosaic Covenant (see Romans 7, where Paul's clear understanding of the demands of the Mosaic Covenant led him to acknowledge his sinfulness). Therefore, at a minimum, "deeds of the Covenant" refer to the Jew's external performance of its commandments through his natural human efforts. Paul will indicate in chapter 4 that there is an additional component to this phrase, the thought that a person is actually making himself worthy of God's blessing, forgiveness, and promise of eternal life, with the result that he gets paid with eternal life and mercy.

Therefore, Paul is saying here that even the mouth of the Jew is shut before God. The Jew may be performing the Torah of the Mosaic Covenant as his God-given religious and national obligation, but he has no defense for his sinfulness. Indeed, Paul is saying, a person most easily comes by an understanding of his sinfulness, not of his forgiveness for God, when he focuses on the Torah and its teaching. When he faces into God's moral demands, especially the 10th commandment of the Mosaic Covenant as Paul will point out in Romans 7, he comes to a deeper understanding of his sin. And his looming eternal condemnation is most obvious to him too as he focuses on the moral commandments of God and his sin, even as a member of God's chosen people. Thus, this person moves towards understanding the importance and value of God's grace through the inward miraculous work of God (see Romans 3:23)!!

Consequently, there are two ways to look at and use the Mosaic Covenant—

- 1) The first is to learn its commandments and believe that it is humanly possible to obey them and become a good person who is acceptable to God and will receive the fulfillment of His promises.
- 2) The second is to learn its commandments and come to realize that it is humanly impossible to become a good person by obeying them and it is impossible to become acceptable to God through one's human efforts, so that it is only by God's grace and the inward work of His Spirit that a sinner becomes acceptable to God and will receive the fulfillment of His promises. This constitutes the proper knowledge or recognition of sin "through the Covenant" as it is intended to teach each sinner.

⁸² Νυνὶ δὲ χωρὶς νόμου δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν – As Paul goes on to introduce the significance of the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, he first states that God's provision of justification/forgiveness to sinful human beings, both Jews and Gentiles, is "independent" of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the Covenant played (and continues to play) a vital role for the entire Jewish nation. However, God never intended for it to remain or be the central focus of their lives. Nor had He yet provided the actual means and basis on which to gain complete and eternal forgiveness from Him.

Instead, He did something else that was completely different within the nation of Israel, whose purpose specifically was to bring about justification (eternal mercy, forgiveness, and life) for not only the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. And, yet, the whole OT ("the Law and the Prophets") spoke of this action by God and "bear witness" to it (see Romans 1:1,2, "the good news of God, which was promised beforehand through His prophets in the sacred writings"). Thus, Paul is also implying that the Jews can read about this central justification event (the life, death, resurrection, and reign of the Messiah) in their own writings, so that it should relativize and attenuate their concern for just the Mosaic Covenant.

⁸³ δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας – Paul now states clearly that God's provision for forgiveness and mercy, i.e., "justification," that is separate from the central role of the Mosaic Covenant in the lives of the Jewish nation is the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, such that simple "belief" in him (and its resultant obedience, both from the Spirit's circumcising a sinful person's heart) achieves what the Mosaic Covenant never could in and of itself—eternal mercy. Paul has already implied in 2:28,29 that this "belief in Jesus the Messiah" comes about by virtue of God's miraculously changing

a sinful human being's heart and inwardness. Now, he is saying that Jesus, not the Mosaic Covenant, is the basis for justification, forgiveness, and salvation.

And this is true for "all those who believe" in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, i.e., "the whole world" of v. 19.

⁸⁴ οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή – Paul also states that God is not concerned about whether a person is a Jew or a Gentile when it comes to granting forgiveness and mercy to him. There is "no distinction" in this manner, which the Jews have a tendency to believe there is—that everyone needs to become Jewish and follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to be justified before God. However, the criteria for "justification" are not the ethnic identity of the person and whether or not the person is pursuing obedience to explicit teachings of the Jewish Mosaic Covenant in hopes of obtaining the promises to the Jews, even though all these have been important in the lives of the Jews. The only criterion for obtaining God's eternal mercy is a changed heart that results in authentic belief in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and all that this means with his fulfilling the role of the final Davidic king of the eternal Kingdom of God and priest according to the order of Melchizedek (see Hebrews). In chapter 4, Paul will demonstrate that all this is in line with the Jewish Torah anyway, going all the way back to Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant. Therefore, while Jesus' actions and a person's belief in him exists without a central focus on the Mosaic Covenant and circumcision which comes from the Abrahamic Covenant, they are nevertheless exactly what the Covenant and the rest of the OT proclaimed would occur and be necessary for any individual's eternal salvation.

⁸⁵ πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ – Again, as stated by Paul in 3:9-19, he says that the reason why the ethnic origin and the strictly outward moral pursuits of a person are not important criteria as to whether or not he will obtain God's mercy is because the real issue is that every human being is equally sinful, thus failing to accomplish moral perfection that would qualify him for entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God, thus requiring that God make a choice independent of the person's ethnicity, etc. to change his inwardness.

The emphasis in this sentence is "everyone"—the Jew, who deceives himself into believing that his study of and obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and Torah makes him worthy of "justification" before God, and the Gentile, who deceives himself into believing that there is no transcendent creator whose forgiveness he desperately must seek through genuine repentance.

Therefore, no one can claim exemption from standing eternally condemned before God on the basis of their ethnicity, their good religious and moral performance, e.g., of the Mosaic Covenant, or their rejection of God for some reason he has rationalized in his own mind. The same is true that no one can claim any degree of priority for God to grant him a changed inwardness and the consequent mercy. This is to say that no one, including any Jew, is in the "first position" to receive God's grace and mercy (see v. 9) in the sense that he deserves it by his religious performance.

As in 2:7, δόξα refers to the highest level of a personal sense of well-being that a human being can achieve and experience and which only comes from being both immortal and morally perfect—as Jesus is now and God will share with his "brethren" who will be conformed to his image as Paul says in 8:29.

It also makes sense to interpret the aorist verb ἥμαρτον as generic so as to translate it with the present perfect tense "has done evil," so that the second verb ὑστεροῦνται, which is in the present tense, describes the effect of everyone's sinfulness.

⁸⁶ δικαιοῦμενοι δωρεὰν τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρόσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ – This is key. Eternal forgiveness and mercy from God comes to any sinful human being, Jew or Gentile, his people group mentioned or not mentioned with respect to the Mosaic Covenant from God with its instructions and promises to the Jews, strictly as a gift that God independently and graciously grants to a person in the light of the fact that Jesus as the Messiah provides for a person the very means and basis to be "redeemed," i.e., to exchange a person's eternal condemnation for mercy because Jesus has qualified to appeal to God for His mercy on behalf of undeserving human beings through his suffering death on the cross. Thus, "justification" is a "gift by means of [God's] grace," because it is Jesus who frees us from God's condemnation and destruction.

It is not a Jew's (or Gentile's) careful study of and practice of the Mosaic Covenant that is the basis of freeing sinners from condemnation. It is Jesus and a person's simple belief in him through the change of heart that the Holy Spirit brings about that is. But the fact that mercy is strictly a gift, while every person in human history (other than Jesus) stands equally condemned before God, means that no one person has "first position" to receive this mercy. No individual, whether Jew or Gentile, is better off than others and is more likely to be granted eternal mercy by God, even if the individual is a member of the Jews who received the promises from God and who is in possession of His messages and information from mankind.

It should be clear by now that the promises of God are intended for a group of people, i.e., individuals in the group of people of the nation of Israel and those associated with Abraham by being in the Messiah Jesus. God has made certain promises through Abraham to the "seed" of Abraham, to his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, specifically that they would be numerous, that they would live on the land of Israel, and that they would eventually become a powerful force within the world, while God has also promised that all those in Abraham and now in the Messiah Jesus by virtue of their imitating Abraham's belief will obtain His eternal mercy and life. Paul will go on to explain this in chapter 4 about both Jews and Gentiles in the light of God's use of Abraham, the first Jew.

But the most important word in this verse is "grace" (χάρις). The fact is that everything a sinful human being needs in order to be saved from eternal death is provided for my God—

- 1) the sacrifice and offering, i.e., Jesus' death on the cross,
- 2) the recognition and valuing the depth of sinfulness by the inward work of the Spirit of God,
- 3) the change of heart and inclinations towards authentic repentance and appeal to God for mercy by the Spirit of God,

4) belief in Jesus as the one offering and leader of God's people by the inward work of the Spirit of God, and
5) obedience of God's moral commandments in the midst of continued sinfulness by the inward work of the Spirit of God.
All the above are included in God's "grace" and unmerited gift to sinners who become justified by God and therefore stand to acquire eternal forgiveness, salvation, and life from Him.

⁸⁷ ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἰλαστήριον διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων – All along, from eternity past, even before the Mosaic Covenant, God intended that the Messiah experience death, like the sacrifices that the Jews made to Him using animals. In other words, the Messiah's death was his making a "propitiatory offering" to God that revealed to all human beings the gravity of their immoral and sinful condition. And this also implied that, as a result of his own offering, he would become a high priest who would stand before God and between Him and any sinner to advocate for the sinner's forgiveness and God's giving him eternal life—as the author of Hebrews declares.

A sacrificed lamb in the context of the Mosaic Covenant communicates the condemned status of the Jewish worshiper before a holy and righteous God, but not as well the Messiah's death. And the Levitical priest communicates that God requires a human advocate on behalf of the sinner. Thus, Jesus' death reveals nothing other than the fact that everyone deserves death and destruction from God—eternally. And his death reveals that he is everyone's priest and advocate "through belief in his blood." Therefore, when people "believed" in his blood and death, they would be demonstrating that they understood the depth of their moral problem and its consequences, that not only did they deserve eternal destruction, but also that they lacked the ability in and of themselves to solve their problem. And they would be demonstrating that they embrace Jesus as the priest who intercedes on their behalf. Therefore, they are embracing God's solution of providing Jesus as not only a revelatory offering on their behalf, but also an advocate who could satisfactorily appeal to God for mercy, resulting in their obtaining His forgiveness and eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Thus, the Mosaic Covenant offerings were the means for the Jews to demonstrate to God with authentic belief that they were fundamentally interested in His mercy, having recognized the depth of their immorality such that they deserved His condemnation and would receive it—if He did not act towards them and independently of them. In contrast, the Messiah's offering, by definition, was to be outside and independent of the Covenant and eternally effective. Therefore, all the evil actions that were "formerly committed" by a human being during his life could be forgiven by God. God could overlook these actions and convey to him mercy and forgiveness because the person had grasped the significance of Jesus' death and believed that Jesus would redeem him from destruction at the final judgment. Thus, it was belief in Jesus as a propitiatory offering, not obedience to the Mosaic Covenant *per se* by presenting the blood of bulls and goats on the place of propitiation above the ark of the covenant, that would result in God's eternal mercy and forgiveness.

But God had made such a big deal of the mercy seat as the place of propitiation (ἰλαστήριον) within the Mosaic Covenant that we can see how hard it would be for the Jews to switch gears completely and change their minds about exactly how God provides forgiveness for His people, to shift one's attention from the mercy seat above the ark in the temple in Jerusalem to a man on a cross outside the gates of Jerusalem. That it is only by belief in the latter that a Jew (or a Gentile) obtains eternal forgiveness and salvation from God. This is a huge, but necessary, intellectual shift.

To look at the four covenants of the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the New, and to see in them a thread of salvation and even eternal life for first the Jews and then the Gentiles, with the Messiah's playing the vital role of destroying Israel's enemies and ruling over them as their king, even eternal king, is an easy thing to do. To change course and see that only the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants retain their eternal and substantive importance, while the Mosaic Covenant never had this, because the Messiah becomes the propitiatory offering to God instead of the animals' being so, is such a radical shift in biblical theology that it is hard to criticize the Jews for not recognizing this shift in the "Law and the Prophets." Yet, this shift is necessary to understand biblical theology correctly.

πάρεσιν comes from the verb παρημι which can mean neglect, abandon, forsake, or even overlook. Thus, God does not take into account former sins so as to destroy a person right away even though this is what the sinner deserves after each and every sin. Instead, God patiently waits until He justifies the person through belief in the Messiah, so that all his sins become forgiven according to His mercy and the person receive eternal life in contrast to eternal death.

Exodus 25:17 "You shall make a mercy seat (כִּסֵּא הַרַחֲמִים) (ἰλαστήριον) of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. **18** You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. **19** Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. **20** The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. **21** You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. **22** There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

Leviticus 16:2 Yahweh said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat (כִּסֵּא הַרַחֲמִים) (εἰς πρόσωπον τοῦ ἰλαστηρίου) which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat."

Leviticus 16:13 "He shall put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die. **14** Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his

finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. 15 Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.”

⁸⁸ ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ – Paul repeats the basic point that he wants to get across, that the purpose of Jesus’ death was to demonstrate during the time period after the first appearance of Jesus just how serious God is about His justice and His mercy. This is in the midst of His “restraint” and patience, so that He refrains from pouring out His anger that would be His exercising immediate justice toward sinful human beings, which, in turn, provides space and time for people to come to grips with the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death as the Messiah.

By making eternal forgiveness something that comes about through the divinely purposed and very public display of the death of the Messiah in Jerusalem during the Roman Empire, God just that much more makes it clear that it is He who causes this forgiveness to happen. Thus, God is demonstrably a God of justice, because the death of Jesus shows how serious He is about morality and its consequences that include eternal death for those who are inherently immoral. Jesus’ death also shows how serious God is about His mercy and ensuring that at least some sinful human beings acquire forgiveness, because belief in the significance of his death will result in such. Therefore, the highlight of Jesus’ death as a propitiatory offering is that God gets to showcase His mercy. It is a “demonstration of His justification.” In this way, God is “both righteous and the justifier of the one who is justified by virtue of belief in Jesus.” God is both a God of justice and mercy, and He has demonstrated this in Jesus’ death.

And this is what He has been wanting to do all along and will do—from eternity past into eternity future.

⁸⁹ Ποῦ οὖν ἡ καύχησις; ἐξεκλείσθη, διὰ τοῦ νόμου; τῶν ἔργων; οὐχί, ἀλλὰ διὰ νόμου πίστεως – It is important to remember that Paul is writing this letter to Gentile Christians in Rome who have not had to interact with Jews for eight years because Emperor Claudius had expelled them from Rome in A.D. 48. Now, after Claudius has died, the Jews are being allowed to return to Rome, and the Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah are going to have to deal with Jews who will pressure them to follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to be *bona fide* followers of this Jewish Messiah (or to be *bona fide* people of God). In other words, the Roman Christians will face the same issues from the Jews that Paul has had to address in other letters, especially Galatians. It is also important to remember that, from the beginning of his discussion of the gospel in Romans 1:14, Paul has pointed to arrogance as the main moral problem facing mankind, because arrogance theologically leads to God’s expressing his anger and justice towards human beings, with the consequent result of their punishment by means of eternal destruction. Bragging about anything, as though the person possesses something or has done something in and of himself apart from having received it or received the ability to do it from God, is the natural immoral action of all human beings because of their sinfulness. Being a Jew, Paul knows how easy it is for a Jew who has been given the Abrahamic promises of God and the Mosaic Covenant (along with the Davidic and New Covenants), to brag about his apparent special status before God, especially as he performs outwardly the Mosaic Covenant and demonstrates in a visible manner his devotion to God. He points to his actions that seemingly conform to the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, actions that are clearly peculiar to him as a member of the nation of Israel and therefore not directly applicable to the Gentile peoples, and he thinks that he is more “righteous” than the Gentiles. In addition, because this, too, is a simple effect of human sinfulness, he thinks that he is making himself worthy of God’s blessings and promises and that this, in fact, was what God intended. He would say that not only is he one of the chosen people of God, but also God has even given the Jews the means to earn His blessings by providing them with the explicit commandments of the Mosaic Covenant—because Abraham was worthy of being chosen by God as the progenitor of the Jewish people. Thus, in the process of acquiring eternal life, this Jew would say that he is doubly blessed by God. God has chosen his specific ethnic group to be special in the world, and He has granted them the means to make themselves worthy of God’s promises and blessings.

However, Paul has destroyed the arrogant Jew’s perspective, and, for that matter, any arrogant Gentile’s thinking the he has earned God’s favor (see Romans 2:1 and notes), by explaining that all human beings, regardless of their association with God, are equally immoral and incapable of pleasing God *in and of themselves*, i.e., with their own innate, human resources. Furthermore, by having referred to Jesus’ death as a propitiatory offering in Romans 3:25, Paul has indicated that the purpose of Jesus’ death is to demonstrate man’s incapability of pleasing God. Therefore, it is necessary to *believe* and want for oneself the continued work that the Messiah can do for a person, which is to appeal to God for eternal mercy at the final judgment. The logical inference, as Paul has taught about the Jew in Romans 2:28,29 is that such belief itself can occur only if God miraculously changes a person’s inwardness in order to obtain God’s blessings and be pleasing to Him.

Thus, like Romans 2:1 where Paul has already addressed himself to the arrogant, self-righteous person, this verse also deals with the same issue. In the light of the fact that some of the Jews returning to Rome will be of the self-righteous kind, or at least unclear as to how exactly the Mosaic Covenant pertains to Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah (as we will see in Romans 14), Paul goes over this issue again, stating explicitly in the next verse, 3:28, that the Jews who are seeking to make themselves worthy of God’s blessings by their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant cannot claim to be any more acceptable to God than Gentiles, especially Gentiles who are simple believers in the Messiah and pursuing general morality outside the Mosaic Covenant and according to God’s grace.

⁹⁰ λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιούσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου – This has got to be a radical statement to Jewish ears. How can Paul say that all that needs to happen in order for a sinful human being to stand to receive God’s eternal forgiveness is that he embrace the Jewish Messiah as his king and priest—without submitting to and diligent obedience to the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant—that appear so central to the Jew and were given the whole nation by God through Moses after He rescued them from slavery in Egypt?

First, we notice that νόμος most likely means Mosaic Covenant and not the whole Torah or Old Testament of the Jews. The reason is that the “deeds” and actions that the Jews were supposed to perform in order to show their allegiance to God and that would result in their receiving God’s blessings were spelled out in Exodus through Deuteronomy, which are the Old Testament books that delineated the Mosaic Covenant.

Second, Paul has just said in Romans 3:21-26 that the basis of God’s rescue of human beings, whether Jews or Gentiles, from His condemnation and destruction is through Jesus and his propitiatory offering, not through obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, he can say that a person, even a Jew, finds forgiveness from God “independently of” following the “Mosaic Covenant,” which, in turn, implies that a person’s ethnic origin (or adherence to the Mosaic Covenant) is irrelevant in the midst of his belief in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus—as Paul goes on to say in the next verse.

Paul is implying that the Mosaic Covenant does not directly pertain to the Messiah as the other three covenants of the Old Testament do. Instead, it points to him indirectly through the animal sacrifices while they point to him directly through the blessing of the great nation and eternal life, the provision of a king for Israel, and the provision of eternal forgiveness through the death of the king on behalf of sinful people.

⁹¹ ἢ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν – It might seem from the fact that the Jews *as an ethnic group* truly are God’s chosen people within human history in the present realm that He is only *their* God, so that if a Gentile desires to be forgiven and blessed by God, then *he must become Jewish and even follow the Mosaic Covenant*, which is specific to the Jews and even contributes to defining what it means to be Jewish. This is to say that it contributes to the basic idea that being Jewish means being physically descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

In addition, the Gentiles, as even stated by Paul in chapter 1, have, for the most part, been polytheists and, therefore, way off in their thinking about the reality of God. Thus, put all these facts together, that God started the Jewish ethnic group with Abraham, made promises to them, including that they become the most powerful nation in history, then gave them the Mosaic Covenant and the rest of his messages (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ – see Romans 3:1,2), including the other two covenants (Davidic and New), and now has even brought into existence their Messiah, and that the Gentiles, have a tendency to be pagan idolators, and it sure could seem that God is interested in only the Jews or only in people being Jewish. Thus, He is only *their* God, so that if anyone else desires to be associated with the one, true God, then the person must become Jewish.

But Paul asks rhetorically, is not the transcendent Creator also the transcendent Creator of the Gentiles and, therefore, just as interested in their becoming “His chosen people” in a real, substantive sense? The implied answer is, Yes!, as Paul will go on to say in the last part of this verse and into the next—as well as in the rest of Romans.

⁹² ναὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν εἴπερ εἷς ὁ θεὸς ὃς δικαιώσει περιτομὴν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως – Here we have the continuation of the radical statement for any Jew to read that Paul started in v. 28—that God justifies, forgives, and grants eternal life to any Gentile who simply believes in and follows the Jewish Messiah—apart from paying any attention to the Mosaic Covenant!! Thus, if the Gentile is not circumcised according to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, but he has been changed inwardly by God (see Romans 2:28,29) and genuinely believes in and embraces Jesus as his Messiah and propitiatory offering/priest, then God is his God, just as much as God is the God of Jews, i.e. believing Jews.

It makes the most sense in this context to interpret Paul’s statement about God, that He is “one” (εἷς) as his referring to God’s being the one and only God of both Jews and Gentiles of genuine belief in Jesus, even though Jesus is Jewish! Consequently, in the final analysis, God is the monotheistic God of all people. He has created them all, controls them all in His story of the creation, and justifies/forgives whom He chooses by changing their hearts (see Romans 2:28,29). Therefore, even though God has chosen the Jews to fulfill a special role in human history in this particular realm, nevertheless, He chooses individual Jews and individual Gentiles to be rescued from His eternal condemnation through the work of Jesus, their king and priest (by his being a propitiatory offering which means that he is also the sole advocate because of his resurrection from the dead to act out this role—see 3:25). Thus, all human beings acquire God’s gift of forgiveness/mercy and eternal life by means of the same mechanism—changed inwardness by the invisible work of the Spirit of God that results in belief in the present truth, which, in this case and at this time of history, is the truth of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah.

And, as Paul has even said in 3:21, the events of Jesus’ first appearance are, in a sense, apart from the central role that the Old Testament has played in the lives of the Jews up to this point, even though the Old Testament foretells the events of both Jesus’ first coming and his second coming. In other words, if all a person knew about was Jesus as the Messiah who suffered death on the cross and the person believed this information, he would be forgiven by God and granted eternal life, even in the midst of his ignorance of the Old Testament and the Mosaic Covenant. (Ironically the same is true of the opposite—that knowledge of and authentic belief in the Old Testament with no knowledge of and belief in Jesus will result in a person’s obtaining the Abrahamic promises, too. The necessary condition established by God is not really the object of the belief but the changed heart that causes authentic belief.)

Both phrases, ἐκ πίστεως and διὰ τῆς πίστεως mean the same thing, i.e., by virtue of a sinful human being’s authentic belief in

God, in Jesus, and from a changed heart.

⁹³ νόμον οὖν καταργούμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ νόμον ἰσχύνομεν – It could make sense here that νόμον means Torah because Paul will include Abraham and David in his discussion, and Abraham lived five hundred years before the Mosaic Covenant while David lived five hundred years after it. However, I think that he is focusing on the Mosaic Covenant because of its central role in the Jews of his day. Therefore, I translate νόμον as the Covenant, i.e., the Mosaic Covenant.

Now Paul asks another important question that seems to flow naturally from what he has been arguing about God's being the God of both Jews *and* Gentiles. Does the fact that a Gentile, by faith in Jesus alone, can become one of God's chosen people and a recipient of eternal life apart from any knowledge of the Old Testament, which has been the scriptures of the Jews and central to their lives and identities as the chosen people of God, in any way invalidate the Torah, the Old Testament, and specifically the Mosaic Covenant? In other words, is Paul kicking the Mosaic Covenant to the curb, so that it was never anything at all in terms of helping the Jews to become the "great nation" and to acquire the blessing of eternal life of the Abrahamic Covenant? Is he thus "invalidating" it as a viable aspect of biblical theology and being used by sinners as something they can and/or should pay attention to for pleasing God?

In 3:3, Paul asked if the unbelief of the Jews invalidated the scriptures which God had entrusted to the Jews? Now, he is asking if the biblical belief and changed inwardness of both Jews and Gentiles similarly invalidates or contradicts God's messages to the Jews through the Mosaic Covenant, because ethnically different people can become forgiven and eternally rescued from God's condemnation apart from the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament and the Mosaic Covenant which God clearly made with only the Jews? Paul's answer of course is, Not at all.

Indeed, Paul states that his emphasis on belief actually affirms the Jewish scriptures and the Mosaic Covenant—because *they* emphasize belief and base even the Jews' obtaining God's eternal mercy on belief and changed inwardness, as Paul will go on to say.

For example, Deuteronomy 10:16, "So circumcise your heart (וּמְלִלְתָּ לְבַבְּךָ) (καὶ περιτεμεῖσθε τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν), and stiffen your neck no longer." It is interesting that the LXX translates "the foreskin of your heart" (וּמְלִלְתָּ לְבַבְּךָ) with "your hard heart" (τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν), thus showing that the Greek translators were doing more interpreting here than simply engaging in "literal" translation. In addition, because God always intended forgiveness to become available for Gentiles through the Messiah apart from the Mosaic Covenant, and because the Covenant rightly reveals God's interest in morality and the problem of sinfulness through the moral commandments and the sacrificial commandments, what Paul is saying affirms the purposes of the Covenant and its place in biblical history for both Jews and Gentiles.

⁹⁴ Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκέναι Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα – In chapter 4, Paul will now answer his question by focusing on Abraham and the kind of existence of faith and belief that he lived. He starts this lengthy explanation with a question regarding Abraham. The question basically is, how did Abraham, as the obvious physical patriarch of the Jews, catch God's attention and obtain the Abrahamic Covenant that contained His blessings and eternal forgiveness?

Implied in the question is, was it by obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and as defined by religious Jews, who unfortunately misunderstand the depth of their sin and inability to obey God properly, so that only "Jews," i.e., actual physical descendants of Abraham through Jacob, and also Gentiles who convert to Judaism acquire eternal mercy and life? Or, for that matter, was it by obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, even if Abraham was or would have been obeying it properly, i.e., with a changed heart and authentic belief? Or was it simply by virtue of his own belief that was just like the belief that Paul has been promoting, which now is belief in Jesus because he now has appeared, which is also a belief that is apart from the Mosaic Covenant and not dependent on people's obedience to it? In other words, is the Mosaic Covenant central and to a necessary condition for a person's receiving the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham?

Because Paul has mostly Jews in mind at this point in his argument, he calls Abraham "our forefather by physical descent." Also, it makes sense to speak of Abraham as an example of one who obeyed properly the Torah, which eventually included the Mosaic Covenant, even though this Covenant came 500 years after him. The reason is that the Mosaic Covenant was an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant for the Jews in the sense that God has been requiring their obedience of it for their being the "great nation" of the Abrahamic Covenant and for their instructing the Gentiles about Him. Thus, if Abraham properly obeyed God apart from the explicit Covenant, which he did, then he would have properly obeyed God within the Covenant had he lived 500 years later. For example, there is Genesis 26:4,5 and what God said to Isaac, "4 I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws [instructions] (וַיִּשְׁמַר אֶת־מִצְוֹתַי וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי וְאֶת־תּוֹרֹתַי) (ἀνθ' ὧν ὑπήκουσεν Ἀβραάμ ὁ πατὴρ σου τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς καὶ ἐφύλαξεν τὰ προστάγματά μου καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τὰ δικαιώματά μου καὶ τὰ νόμιμά μου)."

This is the same language used in Deuteronomy to describe the Israelites' obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. For example, Deuteronomy 4:40 "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments (וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־מִצְוֹתַי וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתַי) (καὶ φυλάξῃ τὰ δικαιώματα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ) which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which Yahweh your God is giving you for all time."

In addition, Paul will go on to say that Abraham found acceptance by God to inherit eternal life apart from the Mosaic Covenant, i.e., strictly through his belief and faithful obedience to what God had revealed to him, even before being circumcised! So, if this

can be true of Abraham, it can be true of either a Jew or a Gentile. That belief in God and now in Jesus *by virtue of a changed heart* meets the necessary requirement and condition of God for obtaining His ultimate blessing of eternal mercy and life—whether within the Mosaic Covenant or outside it.

⁹⁵ εἰ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ἔχει καύχημα, ἀλλ' οὐ πρὸς θεόν – Paul is assuming his readers are tracking with him that “works” are defined by a person’s belief that he is capable in and of himself of producing choices and actions that please God sufficiently by making himself worthy of His promises and mercy, so that he pursue his actions in obedience to God’s instructions. Paul will mention this aspect of works more explicitly in v. 4. And Paul admits that, if Abraham caught God’s attention and became forgiven eternally by God by virtue of *his making himself worthy* with his “works,” i.e., by virtue of “works” and actions that impressed God to the extent that He would say that Abraham had earned His attention and eternal life, then, certainly, Abraham could brag, even before God, of how good he was and acted. Instead, Paul says that Abraham has nothing to brag about, meaning that Abraham had done nothing *in and of himself* to warrant God’s favorable attention and eternal life from Him, implying that his obtaining both of these was by some other mechanism. What was this mechanism? Paul will go on to explain.

⁹⁶ τί γὰρ ἡ γραφὴ λέγει; ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην – This seems a bit short, but Paul points to the Jewish scriptures themselves that state categorically that it was *only* Abraham’s *belief* that God looked at, and it resulted in his justification/forgiveness. It was his belief by which he obtained a standing before God that would result in His granting him the fulfillment of His promises that would include the “great nation” of Israel and eternal mercy and life. While it might be assumed that “belief” is just a “work,” deed, or action in and of itself that could earn God’s attention and blessing, Paul is implying the exact opposite. In other words, belief is definitely something that a sinful human being *does*, but he does not do it in such a way that it earns God’s blessing. The implication, obviously, is that belief is a *gift of God’s grace* as Paul will go on to explain and as he has already implied in 2:28,29 when he spoke of the Spirit’s circumcising a sinner’s heart. Paul’s quote comes from Genesis 15:6, “Then he believed in Yahweh; and He reckoned it to him as justification (תָּרַח אֱבְרָהָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּחְשַׁב־לוֹ אֶת־הַצְּדָקָה) (καὶ ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην).” The Greek words are exactly the same as what Paul has written.

⁹⁷ τῷ δὲ ἐργαζομένῳ ὁ μισθὸς οὐ λογίζεται κατὰ χάριν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὀφείλημα – This is the key statement in Paul’s argument. “Deeds” (or “works”) are defined by actions which can earn a sinner God’s blessings. However, Paul’s explanation of the nature of belief shows that it is different from these kinds of “deeds” and “works” that *earn* God’s blessing. Deeds in this context are of a nature that people can expect to get paid with what they are earning, i.e., a “payment” or reward or wage. Thus, if they have earned eternal mercy and life, then they will get paid with these. Yet Paul says that these kinds of deeds and works do not involve God’s grace. And he has already argued in 3:21-26 that God’s forgiveness is according to His grace, meaning that it is according to *His sovereign and independent choice* to grant both belief and eternal life to a sinner—through the sinner meeting the condition of having a circumcised heart, *which only God can produce*. Therefore, Paul can go on to make the statement that he does in the next verse.

In addition, we can say that an incorrect Jewish mentality sees the Bible as saying that they can make themselves worthy of the promises of Abraham simply by being physical descendants of Abraham and pursuing obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. This perspective assumes that human beings are capable of pleasing God in and of themselves, thus earning whatever blessing God has to offer.

Paul is not criticizing the Mosaic Covenant and obedience to it by the Jews (see Romans 7). He is criticizing their thinking, that it is possible to obtain God’s blessings by earning them. Plus he has already argued that justification, forgiveness, and life come to any sinner outside of the Covenant, i.e., by means of Jesus through the propitiatory offering and sacrifice of himself and his resurrection (see Romans 3:21-26).

Another way to say this is, Jews tend to believe that the Mosaic Covenant exists for the purpose of their impressing God with their righteousness, while God gave it to them to impress them with their sinfulness which cannot be resolved through strictly human effort—as Paul will teach in Romans 7 & 8.

⁹⁸ τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην – Paul continues his explanation of the difference between “works” per se and “belief.” Here, he makes it clear that he is drawing a radical distinction between works and belief. Works as he is defining them here do not involve God’s grace. They are religious actions that a person performs with the perspective that he can earn God’s blessings in and of himself—which fundamentally comes from an unchanged heart. Instead, belief does involve God’s grace and is a gift from him, even if it something that a sinful human being does.

Therefore, the implication that Paul is making is that belief itself *comes from God’s grace*, from His independent and loving choice to act on behalf of and in a sinful human being, whether Jew or Gentile, by *changing his heart* (see Romans 2:28,29) and, thus, *causing* him to believe in God (as Abraham did) and in Jesus as king and priest who offered himself to God (now that Jesus has appeared, made himself known as the Messiah, and invited belief in him!). And the result of this biblical belief *that is not an action that can in any way be said to earn God’s blessing* is God’s blessing of eternal mercy, forgiveness, and life!

Paul is referring to the quote in v. 3 from Genesis 15:6. And with this argument from the life of Abraham, Paul has proven that

his “promotion of belief” in contrast to encouraging people, Jews and Gentiles, to earn God’s blessings through obeying the Jewish, Mosaic Covenant affirms the OT and this Covenant. Thus, biblical belief does not invalidate the Torah or the Covenant in the least. It supports them, *because they promote true, biblical belief*, as demonstrated by looking at how the very first Jew, Abraham obtained the blessing of forgiveness and, therefore, the fulfillment of God’s promises and eternal life. He did so through his belief, which Paul is arguing comes through God’s grace. It does not and cannot originate with man. It originates with God. If a sinful human being sets aside the mentality of making himself worthy of God’s blessing of eternal life and, instead, acquires a *changed inwardness* that results in authentic, biblical belief in God and His truth, particularly the truth that God forgives condemnable human beings through Jesus’ death, etc., then, like Abraham, this person will be considered as one who has a correct standing before God in order to obtain eternal mercy and life at the judgment.

Therefore, Paul is not contrasting outward works *per se* with inward belief the way some Reformed people tend to think, but he is contrasting the intellectual perspective of making oneself worthy before God with the intellectual perspective of knowing that there is nothing one can do to make himself worthy. As a result, forgiveness comes only if God independently and graciously changes a person’s heart and inwardness and causes him to engage in authentic, biblical belief.

Now Paul will go on to argue the same point from another important person’s life in the OT, king David’s.

⁹⁹ καθάπερ καὶ Δαυὶδ λέγει τὸν μακαρισμὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ᾧ ὁ θεὸς λογίζεται δικαιοσύνην χωρὶς ἔργων – Paul now turns to David’s life and a statement that he makes in the OT, in Psalm 32, to argue that his promoting the concept of belief in the Messiah in contrast to encouraging both Jews and Gentiles to obey the Mosaic Covenant in no way invalidates the Jewish scriptures and the Mosaic Covenant. He says that Abraham’s acquiring God’s blessings of eternal mercy, forgiveness, and life is right in line with what David has said in Psalm 32 about how a sinful human being acquires this same blessing through being justified before God, i.e., through acquiring a standing before Him whereby he will be granted all of God’s promised blessings, and it is not through his “works” of doing the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant in order to make himself worthy of obtaining God’s promises.

This, too, is something that his Gentile readers, who may find themselves being pressured by Jewish unbelievers and believers to follow the Mosaic Covenant to earn God’s mercy (or just to be acceptable to God even as believers in Jesus the Messiah), need to keep in mind as these Jews return to Rome after Claudius’ death and the end of his edict to expel the Jews from Rome in A.D. 48.

¹⁰⁰ μακάριοι ὧν ἀφέθησαν αἱ ἀνομίαι καὶ ὧν ἐπεκαλύφθησαν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι μακάριος ἀνὴρ οὗ οὐ μὴ λογίσῃται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν – We notice that David does not start out Psalm 32, “Blessed is the one who makes himself worthy of God’s blessing by his lawful deeds in accord with the Mosaic Covenant,” which would be to think that God’s blessing is on the basis of justice, not on the basis of grace and mercy. Instead, David says nothing about moral obedience to the Mosaic Covenant that results in God’s blessing, except to imply that repentance for a person’s sins has taken place before God, and it is this humble appeal to God for His mercy that has resulted in the blessing of eternal forgiveness and life. In addition, David goes on to say in Psalm 32:5, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide. I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the Lord,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

In other words, David does not appeal to his good works in line with the Mosaic Covenant. He says that God accounts justification to those to whom He does not account sin, which is not because the sinner has all of a sudden become a good and moral person who deserves justification. It must be because God has forgiven the sinner on account of his belief in God as the graciously forgiving God. Nor does David appeal to his bringing the right sacrifices to the temple to obtain God’s forgiveness. Instead, he appeals to merely his repentance and confession of his sins, i.e., to his humble and contrite heart (see Psalm 51). And it is his belief in God’s goodness and mercy that results in exactly these from God. And I wonder if David is thinking ahead to when God will fulfill all His promises to Abraham, both to make the Jews the greatest nation on earth and to grant eternal life to Abraham and those with faith and belief like his.

Therefore, Paul’s using this quote from Psalm 32 implies that, while a Jew would outwardly agree that forgiveness of his sins is necessary to obtain God’s blessings, he inwardly thinks *that he is actually a good person who does not need as much forgiveness as the Bible says he does—if he were to understand the Bible correctly*. This is to say that a perspective that comes merely from one’s sinfulness and that only seems to embrace the *biblical* concept of God’s mercy and forgiveness falls short of doing so. In a twisted and erroneous way, the arrogant and self-righteous person, Jew or Gentile, believes that his goodness that includes repentance, *earns* him God’s mercy—which, in the final analysis, is an oxymoron and does not make sense. But, as we have seen, sinful human beings love to believe nonsense—even that there is no God according to chapter 1!

For a person to acquire God’s blessing (=justification, forgiveness, the promises of God, and eternal life) by virtue of justice is for God to be so impressed with the person’s obedience, indeed, his obedience to the Torah and the Mosaic Covenant, that God considers him to have earned His blessing, which, in turn, would allow the person to brag about his performance and God’s *paying* him with the wage of eternal life and participation in the great nation of Israel. But Paul has been arguing that there is another mechanism entirely for how people, even Abraham, obtain God’s blessings. And the mechanism is God’s grace that results in forgiveness. Along this line, Paul goes in another direction from one of justice and earned payment by speaking of David’s comments about God’s blessing for the one whose sinfulness He *forgives*. And the implied principle of forgiveness is that it *cannot be earned*, as Paul has been arguing. It can only be granted, given, and graced to a sinful human being by God’s independent choice. Therefore, the blessing of which David is speaking is on the basis of only grace/mercy, not justice, and must be on the basis of God’s sovereignly changing a person’s heart (see Romans 2:28,29) and inwardly causing the person to believe the truth that God has spoken to him.

In David's time, this truth obviously did not include Jesus specifically. But it included enough information that the Old Testament believer could know that he was forgiven apart from his trying to earn God's blessings through his performance of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus the Old Testament believer would know, with an outcome equal to that of the New Testament believer, that he is a sinful human being who cannot make himself worthy of God's love, kindness, patience, forgiveness, so that these must be *graced* to him. And the outcome for the Old Testament believer would be eternal life and participation in the great nation of Israel, which is the same as the outcome for the New Testament believer.

Thus, David is saying that the blessing of God comes to sinners, not to immoral persons who can make themselves moral persons who become worthy of this blessing.

¹⁰¹ Ὁ μακαρισμὸς οὖν οὗτος ἐπὶ τὴν περιτομὴν ἢ καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκροβυστίαν; λέγομεν γάρ· ἐλογίσθη τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἡ πίστις εἰς δικαιοσύνην – Now Paul turns to the issue of the timing of Abraham's faith and being considered by God to be justified in Genesis 15:6. Included in this issue is the question that Paul is answering with the whole letter. Has God designed reality so that only people, Jews and Gentiles, who focus their pursuit of obedience on the Jewish Mosaic Covenant that must include circumcision for males, earn and receive His blessings promised to Abraham—of the Jewish “great nation” and of eternal life? Or has God designed reality so that both Jews and Gentiles in the midst of either being circumcised (the Jews) or being uncircumcised (the Gentiles) receive them through another mechanism than their own self-produced obedience? Another way to ask this question is simply, how does Jewish circumcision and, therefore, outward rituals of either the Mosaic Covenant or historical Christianity fit into the process of acquiring eternal life and all that God promised Abraham? But in the background is still the assumption that sinful human beings still try to make themselves worthy of God's blessings through their outward, religious obedience.

Also in this verse, Paul reminds his readers of what he has just said about Abraham in 4:1-5, and he paraphrases Genesis 15:6 in order to explain it in more detail. God considered Abraham justified and forgiven on the basis of his belief in the truth that He had stated to him that his “seed,” i.e., descendants, would be as numerous as the stars of the sky. And this was before God had even given Abraham the commandment to be circumcised, which now allows Paul to go on to say...

¹⁰² πῶς οὖν ἐλογίσθη; ἐν περιτομῇ ὄντι ἢ ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ; οὐκ ἐν περιτομῇ ἀλλ' ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ – Here is Paul's trump card in the form of another question. Was Abraham considered justified, i.e., set to be forgiven by God and receive the blessings and promises that He had spoken and given to him, simply by his fulfilling the condition of being circumcised and having obeyed outwardly His Covenant? Or was Abraham considered forgiven by fulfilling the condition of inward and biblical belief, which Abraham demonstrated in Genesis 15:6 *before* the actual time when he became circumcised in Genesis 17? In other words, was Abraham fully set to receive what God had promised him before there was any commandment by God to do anything outward, especially the commandment of circumcision?

The answer Paul gives is an obvious and resounding, Yes, it was by being changed inwardly (implied) and believing God genuinely, and not by the outward act of circumcision! And Paul will go on to explain that God's blessings, which include eternal life, come to human beings simply as a result of their fulfilling the condition of proper belief from their inwardness that governs their outward obedience. It is not that outward obedience is irrelevant. It is that it must have as its fundamental human foundation divinely changed authentic inwardness that manifests itself most easily in belief in whatever truth God has stated to the individual who believes. In other words, belief in biblical truth is itself a wonderful and divine gift of God's grace—at all levels, intellectual, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

¹⁰³ καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν περιτομῆς σφραγίδα τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐν τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων δι' ἀκροβυστίας, εἰς τὸ λογισθῆναι καὶ αὐτοῖς τὴν δικαιοσύνην – Paul interprets God's commanding Abraham to be circumcised in Genesis 17 as a confirmation, not a condition, of his justification in Genesis 15. And we know from Genesis 15:6 that justification had come to him by virtue of his belief (from his changed inwardness). Thus, outward obedience of circumcision was intended to be simply a clear sign to the person and others that he already had authentic inwardness and belief. By inference, circumcision and all the outward, ritual commandments of the Mosaic Covenant are also intended to be a clear sign of inward change of the heart and authentic biblical belief. However, erroneous Judaism sees the whole covenant as the complete condition for making themselves worthy of God's blessings of the “great nation” and eternal life, not as the seal or confirmation of genuine inwardness.

So the fact that Abraham was already considered forgiven by God before God even gave him the commandment to circumcise himself made it evident that Gentiles who follow in his footsteps by having changed inwardness and genuine belief *without ever becoming circumcised* will obtain the same blessings as Abraham from God. These are the blessings of participating somehow in the future greatness of the nation of Israel and then especially eternal life. Theoretically, if Abraham had died before Genesis 17 when God commanded him to be circumcised, he still would have acquired the fulfillment of His promises, because circumcision only confirmed or provided an outward seal of his justification and having a right standing before God.

But how does this work when God commanded Abraham to circumcise all future recently born sons when they were eight days old? I think that their fathers are then required to teach their sons that their circumcision is worthless before God *unless it becomes a sign of their changed inwardness and authentic belief*, which, again, only God can cause. And then this perspective becomes the same for any Jew's obeying the Mosaic Covenant's outward commandments.

¹⁰⁴ καὶ πατέρα περιτομῆς τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἔχουσιν τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ – Pauls says that, of course, Jews who are circumcised will also receive the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, if they too emulate the belief of Abraham with divinely changed and authentic inwardness. In other words, it is their Abraham-like belief, the kind of belief *that he had while uncircumcised*, that is the determining factor in their lives as to whether or not they receive God’s blessing of mercy, etc.—*because this was the determining factor in Abraham’s life, not his circumcision, which came later*. If they have genuine belief, then their circumcision at eight days old becomes the same sign that it was for Abraham. But only if they have authentic belief.

Thus, belief through a changed heart is the condition which God has placed upon sinful human beings, whether Jews or Gentiles, for their obtaining His blessings promised to Abraham that include justification, the “great nation” of physical Jews, and eternal mercy and life for both Jews and Gentiles in the Kingdom of God. And God by His grace is the only one who can bring this about.

Again, we can compare **Romans 3:29** Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not also the God of Gentiles? Yes, He is the God of Gentiles also, **3:30** if it is true that He is one. He will justify the circumcision by virtue of their belief [circumcised hearts] and the uncircumcision in the light of their belief [circumcised hearts].

¹⁰⁵ Οὐ γὰρ διὰ νόμου ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἢ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου, ἀλλὰ διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως – Coherent with Paul’s argument so far, he is saying that the whole concept of God’s “promise to Abraham or to his descendants/seed” is mechanically different from the “Covenant” *as the Jews understood it*—not as God had presented it. They believed that they were already pleasing to God by virtue of His designating them as His chosen people who were capable in and of themselves to keep the “Covenant” and make themselves worthy of His choosing them. This meant that their obedience to the commandment of circumcision in Genesis 17 and implied in the Mosaic Covenant five hundred years later was simply a demonstration of how good, righteous, and worthy they were of His blessings. This was to think of the “promise” as “with a view to the Covenant” according to Paul here.

Instead, the mechanism of “promise” requires God’s gracious, invisible, and inward activity in a sinner’s heart to change it for him and to cause authentic belief and obedience to arise in his choice making. This is to think of the “promise” as “with a view to justification of belief,” because belief arises as a result of God’s choices and work, not as a result of a sinner’s choices and work *apart from God*.

And the “promise” was that Abraham and his descendants “be the heir of the world.”

When Paul uses the singular “promise,” is he referring to both promises of the Abrahamic Covenant of 1) a great nation and 2) the blessing of eternal life to Abraham and people who imitates his belief? It depends upon what Paul means by the “world” (cosmos) and Abraham’s inheriting it.

There are three options for the “world” (cosmos) –

- 1) Only the new eternal earth and world that will be the dwelling place of eternal life for all believers
- 2) Only this earth and world over which the Messiah, the mortal but believing Jews on the land of Israel, and transformed and immortal believers will rule after his return and he restores the Kingdom of Israel during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20
- 3) The combination of #1 and #2.

Certainly Paul is referring to at least #2, the millennial kingdom. But the last option that includes #1 and the eternal earth is possible too. If Paul means #3, then he is lumping into the word “world” both God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, because for Abraham to experience any one of the promises fulfilled towards him is also to see all of them fulfilled eventually. But the fact that this is within the context of the quote from Genesis 15:6 which concerns only a physical son for Abraham and therefore physical descendants who will have both his ethnic quality of Jewishness and spiritual quality of authentic belief, #2 may be the extent of what he means, even though he is highlighting in chapter 4 the fact that both circumcised believers among the Jews and uncircumcised believers among the Gentiles obtain justification and God’s blessings of the promises to Abraham. Thus, it may very well be that Paul narrows his focus to Abraham “or to his seed/descendants,” i.e., to Jewish descendants with his kind of faith as his physical and spiritual descendants, so that he will inherit this cosmos/world on the condition that he becomes justified before God through his belief and not through his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, erroneously understood, that would include physical circumcision (that God actually gave him in Genesis 17) and making himself worthy of God’s promises.

The biblical documents show that Abraham can and will participate in the millennial kingdom of the Messiah even though he never heard of or sought to obey the Mosaic Covenant, while it will be his Jewish, physical descendants (and some spiritual descendants among the Gentiles) who will actually live as mortal believers in this earthly kingdom of the present realm. Thus, the same is true for all Jewish believers as it will be for Abraham (and actually for all Gentile believers who simply imitate Abraham’s faith), who all have the invisible work of God’s grace within them to change their hearts and to cause them to be authentic believers.

Thus, Abraham received through belief alone by God’s grace his standing before God whereby he would obtain all His blessings, especially that of this cosmos/world whereby Jesus and his followers among all the Jews on the land of Israel will acquire this whole realm as that which they govern, because the Jews will become the “great nation” of the promise of Genesis 12, which in turn will make them the most powerful nation in all human history as they will rule over the entire earth, something no nation has ever done.

By inference, Paul clearly declares that God’s promise to Abraham and all his descendants that they would inherit the cosmos/world, either as mortal Jews who comprise the greatest nation in history or immortal Jews (and Gentiles) who had died

before or were alive at Jesus' return, was outside the giving of the Mosaic Covenant and outside the erroneous perspective of the Jews, i.e., that they on their own were good enough to be God's chosen people.

Thus, it is belief (by God's grace and inward work) as stated in Genesis 15:6, not Covenant keeping *per se*, whose source is strictly human, that results in justification now, i.e. having a standing before God that will result in future forgiveness and life in the "great nation" of Israel, and therefore in eventually eternal life for any sinful human being. Therefore, following the Mosaic Covenant, like obeying the commandment for Jewish males to be circumcised, becomes a sign and confirming seal of the inward reality of a changed heart and authentic belief.

God had promised in Genesis 12:1-3 that Abraham and his physical descendants would "inherit" the land of Israel.

And here is Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:13, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

As suggested above, while it is possible that Paul is referring to only the Jews' inheriting "the world" (κόσμου) as the new, eternal cosmos, in this context where Paul is including Gentiles in the blessings that God grants to Abraham and people who believe God *like him*, it still makes sense to interpret the "world" as first this temporary earth of Revelation 20 with the future, eternal earth of Revelation 21 as an inference. But the focus is on the "great nation" of the Jews which will involve justification by belief for Abraham and his descendants and also the Mosaic Covenant. But it is the former and the statement about Abraham's belief apart from circumcision and the Mosaic Covenant five hundred years later that is key for Abraham and his fellow Jews (and for Gentiles).

¹⁰⁶ εἰ γὰρ οἱ ἐκ νόμου κληρονόμοι, κεκένωται ἡ πίστις καὶ κατήρηται ἡ ἐπαγγελία – Paul now goes on to highlight how focusing on the Mosaic Covenant and self-obedience of it by the Jews apart from God's causation through His grace for their obtaining God's blessings completely misses the point of the Abraham Covenant and specifically Genesis 15:6 where Abraham is declared justified because he has fulfilled the condition of authentic belief in God. He states simply here that focusing on the Mosaic Covenant renders both belief (that results in justification) and the promise (that is the outcome of belief and justification) irrelevant and even destroyed—because the Jew focuses on the Covenant while thinking that he is capable by himself to obey it and please God enough to pay him with His blessings.

So Paul is not concerned about the chronology and timing of the promises and the "Covenant." His concern is the self-understanding of the Jew. The best way to understand the belief of Abraham is to see it in the context of basic, human sinfulness and the need for God to work His gracious work in the sinner to produce the kind of belief that Abraham had.

Therefore, as the Jews think, if focusing on the Mosaic Covenant which came five hundred years after Genesis 12 and 15 makes oneself worthy of eternal life by obedience to it and is the requirement for obtaining eternal life, then what does this do to the statement in Genesis 15:6 to the effect that Abraham stood to inherit the promise of God's blessings simply because he had fulfilled the condition of authentic belief—five hundred years before the Mosaic Covenant? It nullifies it and makes it void, because it shifts the condition to earning God's blessing. This in turn renders God's promises null and void because He declared that Abraham would enjoy their fulfillment when, according to the Jewish thinking of Paul's (and our) day, clearly he would not because he had not earned God's blessings through his obedience to circumcision and the Mosaic Covenant later.

By the way, this is another way of saying what Paul will make more explicit in Romans 7, that there is nothing wrong with the Mosaic Covenant. The problem is sin, and the necessary condition for solving the problem of sin is belief *from an inwardness changed by God* that becomes accounted to a sinner as justification which will eventually result in receiving the promises of God.

¹⁰⁷ ὁ γὰρ νόμος ὄργην κατεργάζεται – Several options for what Paul means here—

1) He is now shifting slightly and stating that part of the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is to make the Jews (and Gentiles who are paying attention to the Jews who should keep all God's commandments and do not) aware of God's wrath (and condemnation, punishment, and destruction by extrapolation – see Romans 2:3-12) so that they turn to Him with genuine repentance and faith. This could be through a person's facing honestly into the depth of his sin through the 10th Commandment as Paul describes in Romans 7.

2) He is saying that through the death of the animals, who are sacrificed as an example of what the Jews deserve, they intuit their deserving death for their insoluble problem of sin that points them to the Messiah whose death does the same in order for him to qualify to be their eternal high priest and intercessor.

3) He is saying that through God's later response to their disobedience of the Mosaic Covenant, God destroyed the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah through the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

4) He is still saying that Jews who obey God through their own self-obedience that does not change to God-caused obedience when He circumcises their hearts will incur, to their surprise, God's wrath and condemnation.

The context points to #4. The "Covenant" all by itself without God's invisible and inward work, which it even says in Deuteronomy 30 is both necessary and will happen to the Jews, produces only God's wrath and condemnation.

It is authentic belief that comes from a changed inwardness that is the key to acquiring God's blessings. Possessing the Mosaic Covenant alone without the inward work of the Holy Spirit leads to a false belief that a sinner can become good enough on his own to please God and find acceptance and the fulfillment of His blessings.

¹⁰⁸ οὐδὲ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος οὐδὲ παράβασις – Take the Mosaic Covenant away, and there is nothing that the Jew is looking at to believe that he by himself can please God and make himself worthy of God's blessings. Therefore, there is no "transgression" of

this erroneous belief with its resultant religious actions. Instead, what the Jew will have is God's grace and authentic belief. Paul is making the vital point that Abraham found justification apart from the Mosaic Covenant which has been and continues to be the focus of erroneous Judaism. In other words, take away the Mosaic Covenant and replace it with Abraham's grace-caused belief, and the "transgression" of erroneous Judaism goes away too. Take away the outward list of commandments for human beings to perform externally *by means of their own innate ability* (as if this is what God intended with the "Covenant," which He did not as explained by Deuteronomy 30), and what do you have? Justification by inner belief and faith from a changed heart—which will certainly result in receiving the fulfillment of God's promises and all His blessings!!

Therefore, with Paul is saying in this chapter, with God's grace working in him, a sinner is not left with just an awareness of the depth of his sin with no viable solution. He is left with belief in His truth that removes the threat of God's wrath, condemnation, punishment, and destruction, which includes justification and God's blessings of the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham. In other words, a sinner is left with God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and the statement in Genesis 15:6 to the effect that he found justification, forgiveness, participation in the "great nation" of Genesis 12, and ultimately eternal life through belief by means of God's circumcising his heart.

All this would be quite surprising to any Jew who focuses on Moses and his covenant and not on Abraham and the actual predictions of the Messiah in the OT woven in between the statements of God's faithfulness and grace.

And it is grace that Paul will go on to mention.

¹⁰⁹ Διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ πίστεως, ἵνα κατὰ χάριν, εἰς τὸ εἶναι βεβαίαν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι, οὐ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ. ὅς ἐστιν πατὴρ πάντων ἡμῶν – Paul explicitly connects "belief" to "grace," that it is "according to" it that belief occurs, which results in the guarantee of the "promise" to "the descendants" of Abraham. And this is the case for both "the one who is by virtue of the Covenant only," i.e., the Jew of authentic belief, and the one "of Abraham-like belief," i.e., the Gentile of authentic belief. And this is because Abraham is "the father of us all," which is to say of all who are characterized by genuine belief, which means, too, that God has changed their hearts through the invisible work of His Spirit. Thus, the promises of God are fulfilled because of an inward change by the Spirit of God and authentic belief (and obedience) that results. This will be for the Jew who is following the Mosaic Covenant and, by extrapolation, for the Gentile who has only authentic faith and belief.

Here is the inclusion that Paul has been emphasizing—that authentic belief in a Jew properly includes the Mosaic Covenant (as a sign and confirming seal of his belief), while the opposite is true also, that a Jew's following the Mosaic Covenant must include authentic belief in order for him to obtain the fulfillment of God's promises in Genesis 12:1-3. Consequently, the authentic belief of Abraham came through the inner work of God's grace (and His Spirit – see Romans 2:28-29), and the same is true for believing Jews who are seeking to obey the Mosaic Covenant and for believing Gentiles who have no obligation to this Covenant. Faith is a gift of God and His grace to sinners.

Paul says that this makes Abraham the father of all believers, regardless of their ethnic origin, which is in accordance with what God states in Genesis 17:5 regarding the "many peoples." The fact that God by His grace produces authentic belief in many Jewish people implies that He does the same for any Gentile who will receive the fulfillment of His blessings—again because Abraham found justification by his belief and not by his religious performance of the Mosaic Covenant which came five hundred years later.

Indeed, God's gracious and sovereign, independent choice to change people inwardly and save them from His wrath and destruction through Jesus' advocacy is what is at the heart of Paul's mind and message. This is what he said too in [Romans 3:24](#) "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." And because justification comes about through authentic belief, then belief, justification, redemption, deliverance, salvation, the "great nation," blessings, the Kingdom of God, and eternal life all go together and never occur because of a sinner's religious (or even moral activities) that he does with a mind to make himself worthy of God's blessings—whether through the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant or through the requirements invented by Christians. Paul is saying the same thing in [Romans 4:4](#) "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due."

Notice that Paul uses the relative clause regarding Abraham, "who is the father of us all." All authentic believers become his spiritual descendants of sorts because they exhibit an authentic belief in God's truth, especially now which is the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. Jewish believers, those who come from a foundation of having been exposed to and following the Jewish Mosaic Covenant, and Gentile believers, those who have likewise acquired a belief similar to Abraham's, both have their belief as a result of God's grace. Thus Paul would certainly call Abraham the spiritual "father" of them all. They are thinking, believing, and acting like Abraham, who himself never considered that he had to follow the Mosaic Covenant (or even be circumcised since this came later than Genesis 15:6) and should earn God's blessings (see 4:4). His God-given belief would make these ideas just as foreign to him as they were to Paul and as they should for us.

Inheriting the cosmos/world, i.e., the restored Kingdom of Israel of Revelation 20 (that will ultimately lead to the eternal earth of Revelation 21), is by virtue of God's grace bringing about authentic belief in Jewish sinners (and in Gentile sinners). Because this is all true, the promise of eternal life comes to every one of the "descendants" of Abraham who are such by virtue of their being his physical descendants, the Jews, i.e., "the one[s] who is [are] such by virtue of the Covenant only." Paul means also that these Jews are authentic believers. And we also know that Abraham's "descendants" also include those who simply have "Abraham-like belief." These are Gentile believers who have no obligation to the Mosaic Covenant.

Paul is also saying that because the inheritance of the future cosmos/world of Jesus' and Israel's "great nation" comes to people

by the instrument of God's grace, this also means that the people of genuine belief are guaranteed to receive it. Once God's grace, His independent choice that results in His acting on behalf of people by changing them inwardly, begins its operation towards a particular individual, it does not stop until it accomplishes its goal of ushering this person into the eternal Kingdom of God. This is in spite of the fact that the person never makes himself worthy of God's working within him and for him. Therefore, the entire process that is based on God's grace ends up being one that is completely miraculous. The authentic believer NEVER DOES ANYTHING that impresses God and motivates Him to act on behalf of him, as if he deserves God's blessings and kindness. Instead, God is always lovingly, kindly, and faithfully acting towards him that will culminate in his obtaining eternal life and the Kingdom of God, first on this earth in the "great nation" and then on the new earth after this present realm is destroyed.

¹¹⁰ καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν τέθεικά σε – Paul further explains the fact that it is God's grace that saves sinners from his wrath by quoting Genesis 17:5 to the effect that it was and will be God and God alone who causes Abraham to become "the father of many nations."

There are two options for what God meant in Genesis 17:5—

- 1) that Abraham will become the patriarch of a multitude of believing sinners, both Jews and Gentiles (in line with God's second promise in Genesis 12:1-3), or
- 2) that Abraham will become the patriarch of a multitude of believing Jews who will eventually enjoy the "great nation" of the first promise of Genesis 12:1-3.

I think that #1 is correct, so that Paul is using this statement by God to bolster the point that Abraham with his authentic belief which was accounted as justification would become the patriarch of believing Jews who would also become authentic believers like him and would obtain the fulfillment of God's promises as Abraham would and the patriarch of sorts of believing Gentiles who would become authentic believers and obtain God's promises like him.

Thus, it is God's miracle of grace that pulls this off, not Abraham's "Covenant" keeping per se with his own ability as a sinful human being, not even his circumcision according not Genesis 17 that might possibly make him worthy of God's blessings. In other words, Abraham does not keep the Mosaic Covenant or even become circumcised as that which becomes the basis for people from every nation imitating his belief. The basis is God's sovereign, independent choice and His work through His Holy Spirit and grace that brings this about. God says, "I have established you..." not, "You have established yourself..." and the emphasis is on the "I".

Genesis 17:5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram [exalted father], but your name shall be Abraham [father of many]; for I have made [set, established] you the father of a multitude of nations (אֲבִרָם אֲבְרָהָם אֲבִי רַב לְעַמִּים) (ὅτι πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν τέθεικά σε)."

God mentions two different groups of people in Genesis 17:1-8—

- 1) believers from all ethnic groups throughout the world (17:4,5), and
- 2) Isaac and his descendants through Jacob only, i.e., not through Esau (17:7ff.).

Therefore, the καθὼς here in Romans 4:17 identifies the relationship between what God was saying in Genesis 17:5 about Abraham and his spiritual descendants, the Jews and Gentiles, and what Paul is saying in this section. Just as God by His grace promised the physical/spiritual descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob and in other ethnic groups, He also is creating spiritual descendants of Abraham among the Jews and Gentiles now.

This is in line with what God says to Jacob "when he came from Paddan-Aram and He blessed him" in **Genesis 35:11** "God also said to him, 'I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. 12 The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.'"

The same with Jacob's statement to Joseph regarding his younger son Ephraim in **Genesis 48:19** "But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.'"

¹¹¹ κατέναντι οὗ ἐπίστευσεν θεοῦ τοῦ ζῳοποιούντος τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα – There are at least three options for what Paul means here –

- 1) Paul refers to the most extreme case of God's power, both raising physically dead people back to life (and eternal life) and making things exist that do not yet exist, in order to emphasize not only how powerful God is but also how much it made sense for Abraham to trust God for His promise of a physical descendant through Sarah.
- 2) Paul refers to God's granting eternal life to those who have been spiritually dead because of their sinfulness and unchanged hearts, as well as God's being the transcendent creator of things not yet created and in existence...
- 3) Paul refers to God's powerful ability to make Sarah's dead womb alive with a baby and to make Isaac come into existence who did not yet exist to describe accurately exactly what Abraham's belief involved...

It appears most that Paul is making a general statement about God that anyone who believes in Him recognizes about His ability. In other words, #1 is the correct interpretation, that the remarkable thing for all believers, and especially for Abraham who looked forward to a son whom God had promised, is that He is powerful enough to raise the dead and to create that which is not yet created. This also is in line with Paul's other uses of the word ζῳοποιέω in the NT. God makes alive that which is physically dead and even causes the dead to have eternal life.

Plus, after God had stated in Genesis 17:5 that He is the basis of Abraham's becoming "the father of many peoples," i.e., among

many Jews and Gentiles where they will imitate his faith, Abraham went on to believe God for this in the same manner that he believed God in Genesis 15:6 that his physical descendants, the Jews, would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. Thus, Paul goes on to describe this situation. Abraham himself needed miraculous belief in God's performing the miracle of providing him with a son and physical descendants after him, along with God's causing Jews and Gentiles to become authentic believers like him. Therefore, Paul describes God as He who grants "life" to dead people and, by extrapolation, to Sarah's dead womb and who will make Isaac exist when he had not done so before.

This description of God highlights how faithful and committed to Abraham He was in establishing him as the model of faith for the Jews and how miraculous Abraham's faith was. Thus, Abraham believed that this was exactly the kind of God who was making the promises to him. God can and did reverse the deadness of Sarah's womb, and God did make that which did not exist by bringing about the birth of Isaac—when God can grant eternal life to believers who have died and bring into existence even the Kingdom of God.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies (**ζωοποιήσει** καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν) through His Spirit who dwells in you.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive (**ζωοποιηθήσονται**).

¹¹² Ὅς παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ἐπίστευσεν εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι αὐτὸν πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον· οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου – Thus, Paul says that Abraham believed that "he would become 'the father many peoples,'" that God would fulfill His promise to bring about many spiritual descendants among the Jews and the Gentiles—"against hope" and "on the basis of hope," which is to say, when Sarah's barrenness and Abraham's old age would not instill any hope in Abraham, and yet he was placing his hope in the transcendent creator, God who is the author of this whole story and capable of miracles and bringing anything that is not yet created into existence by creating it.

And Abraham's belief was in line with his trusting God to fulfill His promise to grant him a son and physical descendants, who would also eventually become spiritual descendants of authentic belief, as He had previously stated in Genesis 15:5, "Thus shall your descendants be."

This belief was in opposition to the obvious physical facts, that Sarah had been barren and was now too old to have a child, and that he too was beyond the age of having a child. Thus, Abraham's situation looked hopeless except for the power and miraculous work of the transcendent author of all reality—God. But this is exactly the point!!

¹¹³ καὶ μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει κατενόησεν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα ἧδη νεκρωμένον, ἑκατονταετής που ὑπάρχων, καὶ τὴν νέκρωσιν τῆς μήτρας Σάρρας – Paul continues to point out the rather hopeless situation, physically speaking, which Abraham found himself in. He was too old to have a child, and Sarah was too old and barren to have a child. They were both "dead" from the standpoint of having children. From a human perspective, there was no way that God's promise of having physical descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens (Genesis 15) and a multitude of them (Genesis 17) could happen. All that could happen was for them to die childless—or adopt someone who could become his heir (Genesis 15).

But Abraham did not let the physical limitations of their situation diminish his belief in God that God could perform a miracle and provide Sarah and him with their own son. Certainly, the possibility of God's promise of a son looked altogether dim and non-existent when he considered the condition of Sarah's body in that she was past the age of child-bearing and, besides, had been barren up to this point in her life. Plus, he was too old to cause her to get pregnant. As a result, they both were close to death and past the age of child-bearing. So how could God provide them with a son? It would have to be only by a miracle, i.e., by His grace!! Therefore, also by grace, Abraham did not weaken in his belief in this promise. Belief and miracle go hand in hand. But, in the case of eternal life, it also involves waiting for God to perform a miracle until He grants undeserved mercy and forgiveness to a sinful human being who otherwise deserves death and destruction at the final judgment. This will definitely be a miracle!

¹¹⁴ εἰς δὲ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει, δοὺς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ – In fact, rather than look at his situation strictly from a human and, therefore, hopeless perspective, Abraham grew stronger in his belief as time went along, especially, we can assume, after the covenantal ceremony of Genesis 15, where God made it clear that He was guaranteeing the fulfillment of His promises and would cause Abraham to meet His requirements of persevering in his belief. Thus, God's grace caused Abraham not to doubt with total unbelief God's promise of a son and future, believing physical descendants. Instead, His grace caused him to believe Him for His promise, and it caused Abraham and Sarah to have a son miraculously, since they were both beyond the age of childbearing and unable to have a child due to Sarah's barrenness. The upshot of the statement in this verse is that a person's belief "increases" and strengthens over the course of his life, in spite of continued innate sinfulness which he displays and in spite of times of profound stress on his faith where it may appear especially to him as though he has none and in spite of existential circumstances that look as though they are going in the exact opposite direction that God has promised!!

But as long as God's grace, according to His eternal plans and purposes, persists in working within the person, his belief is growing—by definition. This is clear even from Abraham's life, because he actually did not display such great belief in certain instances after God had declared him justified because of his belief in Genesis 15 (see Genesis 16 and what he did with Hagar and Genesis 20 and what he did in light of his fear of Abimelech, telling Sarah to lie). In this regard, Romans 7 and the dichotomy of God and sin within a person was at work in Abraham, too. He was not a morally perfect person, and no one else has been except Jesus as the very icon of God within the human race. Therefore, his belief was strengthened while he also gave glory to God by continuing to believe that He can perform and cause to exist whatever He declares that He will do—and that is in the

midst of the sinfulness of human beings who do not deserve anything good from God.

¹¹⁵ καὶ πληροφορηθεῖς ὅτι ὁ ἐπήγγελται δυνατός ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι διὸ ὅ[καὶ] ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην – In addition to God’s grace causing Abraham to believe God in a fully convincing way and causing Sarah and Abraham to have a son, there is also the fact that Abraham’s grace-caused belief qualified him to stand before God as a future recipient of the “great nation” of Israel along with eternal forgiveness and life.

Paul also points out that Abraham’s belief ultimately was in God’s power, i.e., His ability to provide him with a son miraculously, and, therefore, to fulfill the complete promise to him of many physical and believing descendants and fellow believers among the Gentiles.

The way that Paul is telling the story of Abraham leads to his being able to highlight Abraham’s belief that was accounted to him as having a standing before God, so that he would survive eternal death to participate in the “great nation” of Israel and eternal life long after the Genesis 15 event and Moses’ comment in v. 6 to this effect. In other words, Paul is saying that every moment that Abraham believed and grew stronger in his belief (even in the midst of his ongoing sin) was a moment of God’s accounting his belief to him as justification. This meant that Abraham was justified by his belief every moment that he believed, thus showing that “justification by faith” is an ongoing condition of an inwardly changed human being in his relationship with God, and not just a one-time event. Therefore, Abraham was set apart first by God’s inward work, i.e., salvation by sanctification by the Spirit of God, and then he believed God for the fulfillment of His promise of a physical heir which would lead to many more believing physical descendants, i.e., salvation by justification for them (and for the Gentiles who would believe through them). This was in line with Abraham’s believing God that people from all ethnic groups would imitate his faith and acquire the same blessings as he would obtain according to God’s promises in Genesis 12:1-3.

¹¹⁶ Οὐκ ἐγράφη δὲ δι’ αὐτὸν μόνον ὅτι ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ – Paul states that Moses, to the extent that he understood God’s overall plans and purposes for human history, basically wrote Genesis for posterity. When he recorded in Genesis 15:6 that God accounted Abraham’s belief to him as justification, it was not only to indicate this fact with respect to Abraham. It was also to reveal that all other sinful human beings acquire God’s justification and the fulfillment of His promises through the same means. In other words, Moses did not write Genesis 15:6 about Abraham as though it were relevant to only Abraham. He wrote it for everyone who would read it so that they could realize that their genuine belief in God’s truth, whatever truth they were hearing at the moment like that which Abraham heard in Genesis 15 about his physical, believing descendants, qualified them to have this same standing before God whereby they would acquire the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham.

¹¹⁷ ἀλλὰ καὶ δι’ ἡμᾶς, οἷς μέλλει λογιζέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐγεύραντα Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἐκ νεκρῶν – Thus, fifteen hundred years after Moses wrote, Paul and his contemporary, believing Jews (and believing Gentiles), as they came in contact with the truth of Jesus as the Messiah, acquired the same standing before God as Abraham. Therefore, they were not believing the exact same ideas as Abraham in Genesis 15:5 regarding the number of Abraham’s physical descendants. Instead, they were believing the ideas regarding Jesus’ as their offering and priest before God and who died and whom God raised from the dead to obtain His eternal mercy.

Thus, Moses’ writing about Abraham illustrates the situation for each and every person with genuine belief who would read the story. Paul can see the benefit for him and his readers who have chosen to believe God just as Abraham did, that if He could grant life to Sarah’s womb, He could also raise Jesus from the dead and thereby confirm that he qualified to be the Messiah. As a result, Jesus will go on to intercede at the final judgment for rebellious human beings who are genuine believers. Jesus’ resurrection was a miracle, and his advocacy for sinful human beings will be a miracle. Those who believe Jesus to be their advocate are thus counting on a future miracle and having to wait for God to perform it—all in line with His promises and according to His grace. But the waiting will be worth it!

¹¹⁸ ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν καὶ ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἡμῶν – As stated already, Paul speaks of Jesus as the one who offered himself to God on behalf of sinful human beings, in order to provide them with a means to obtain God’s forgiveness and eternal life (see 3:23-26). Here, Paul puts it in terms of Jesus’ being delivered (passive voice) up to death on account of our transgressions” and sins. And then he was raised (also passive voice) from the dead “on account of our justification.”

Once Jesus obeyed God the Father by allowing himself to be crucified on the cross, he became the basis for salvation and forgiveness for sinners, so that God raised him from the dead made him the foundation of “justification” for sinners of authentic belief.

Here the “our” may also refer to only Jews who become authentic believers like Abraham and who gain forgiveness from God and justification that will lead to their participation in His fulfilling His promises to Abraham. But then in the next verse of chapter 1, certainly he expands the 1st person plural to all believers, including those in Rome to whom he is writing.

Thus, God indicates that Jesus has qualified through his death to be the very means by which people can acquire His eternal forgiveness, and a sinner’s authentic belief in Jesus obtains for him a firm standing before God whereby he will be granted mercy and life through Jesus—along with participating in the “great nation” of Israel, the first stage of the Kingdom of God.

In this way, Paul finishes his argument that his “promotion of belief” (3:31) in no way invalidates the Jewish Torah and Mosaic Covenant. Instead, it supports and confirms them, so that anyone who wants the blessings of the Jewish Old Testament patriarch Abraham obtains them through belief in God’s statements of truth just as Abraham did. Only now, the truth involves Jesus of

Nazareth as the Messiah and priest before God because of the offering that he made to God by means of his death on the cross. And not only is a person's individual belief a miracle of God's grace (as Abraham's was), but that for which he is believing God, eternal life, will be a miracle also. Again, belief is a miracle and involves waiting for God to perform another miracle according to His promises to Abraham to make Israel a "great nation" and to grant life in this nation and eternal life to anyone who imitates his faith and belief.

The only other place where δικαίωσις is used is in **Romans 5:18** "Therefore, just as because of one transgression there was condemnation for all men, thus, also, in connection with one just punishment there is justification leading to life for all men (εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς)." It seems most reasonable to assign the same meaning of justification to this word as to δικαιοσύνη.

¹¹⁹ Δικαιοθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – Having argued so far that hopelessly sinful human beings, whether Abraham or anyone else, can obtain God's blessing of forgiveness and eternal life only by God's graciously fulfilling the condition He has place on us, by changing them inwardly and causing them to believe His truth, whether His promise that Abraham will have a son and his descendants will be numerous or His revelation that Jesus is the Messiah and propitiatory offering to God (see Romans 4 and 3:21-26 respectively), Paul articulates in 5:1-11 the fundamental implications of this forgiveness for those who now are believers in Jesus (and by extrapolation anyone who was a believer prior to Jesus' first appearance).

The "we" of this section refers to the "us, to whom [justification] is inevitable that it is accounted" in 4:24, i.e., those believers like Paul in the 1st century of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, these ideas pertain to any person who becomes a believer in Christian history up to and during the time of Jesus' messianic kingdom in Israel (as described in the vision of Revelation 20). The first implication of justification by belief, of acquiring a standing before God whereby we are guaranteed to be forgiven and enter eternal life in the Kingdom of God, is that a forgiven person is at peace with God. In chapters 1 & 2, Paul explained that God will express His anger and condemnation towards all human beings who remain rebellious towards them and strictly sinners without changed hearts during their entire lives. He implied, therefore, that as sinners we are at war with God and His enemies because of our unwillingness to submit to him in our hearts and minds. However, when we start down the path towards complete forgiveness by virtue of God's inner work through His Spirit and our belief, we move into a new relationship with Him whereby we are at peace with Him. We become His friends. We were His enemies, but God will never again be angry with us who are authentic believers, so that, even at the final judgment (when Jesus returns), we will sense God's kindness and compassion toward us. And all of this is because of Jesus' messianic role as propitiatory offering and advocate at the judgment.

Even if the rest of the world were to be at war with us because of their hostility towards God and our belief in God, we are at peace with God (and with ourselves), so that we rest in God's promise of our future existence in the eternal Kingdom of God.

¹²⁰ δι' οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχάκαμεν τῇ πίστει εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐν ἣ ἐστήκαμεν – In 3:24 Paul introduced the fact that God's grace is His independent, loving choice to act internally in sinful people who need His mercy in order to escape His condemnation and destruction by changing their hearts and causing them to perform authentic belief in the truth which He has presented to them, especially that Jesus is the Messiah and sacrificial offering by which He grants them eternal life and forgiveness.

In line with this fact, Paul here comments that, it is because of Jesus and his role as eternal advocate before a God of justice, who naturally would condemn us, that authentic believers have gained permanent entrance into a state of God's grace, i.e., into His choosing to act in only a kind and forgiving way toward them from the beginning of their journey of authentic belief, when He changed their hearts (see Romans 2:28,29), right on into eternity. Not only does God faithfully continue causing people to believe His truth by His grace, but He will be merciful to them at the judgment and on into their existence in the newly created Kingdom of God by His grace also. In this way, Paul shows that Jesus and his death are an integral part of God's loving plan to grant eternal forgiveness and life to human beings.

¹²¹ καὶ καυχόμεθα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ – We usually think of boasting or bragging as something negative, because it offends that sensibility within us that is more attracted to humility than to arrogance. However, the boasting that Paul is talking about here refers not to arrogance, but to humility. This is in conjunction with the idea of the personal significance, meaningfulness, and enjoyment in that which a person boasts. Therefore, this boasting is the choice to exult, rejoice, and find one's personal significance and worth on the basis of what God is doing through His grace and mercy towards sinners, not because of what human beings accomplish in and of themselves—that they think makes them worthy of God's and people's praise. This is why in 5:11 Paul lists God as the final boast of authentic believers. We boast in God and not in ourselves. And we boast in what God is doing and will do on the basis of His choice of us to whom He grants the fulfillment of His promises. Therefore, our boasting is never in our human capability or achievements. It is in God's ability and faithfulness to finish the process which He has begun of rescuing us from His condemnation and providing us with eternal life through the belief and obedience which He also supplies us by changing our inwardness through the work of His Holy Spirit.

In this case in 5:2, the humble, personal significance, meaningfulness, and enjoyment that we Christians experience is in the confident waiting for the glorious eternal life, which will bring us joy and happiness beyond our imagination. Paul is simply saying that as authentic believers in Jesus as our Messiah, we humbly declare that our personal significance and worth as human beings in this world is completely wrapped up in waiting confidently for our wonderful experience in the Kingdom of God—that comes by God's grace so that we will neither earn nor acquire it by our own efforts. We choose to wait confidently for eternal life, even if (and, really, because) our choice is a gift of God's grace. This is the second implication of being justified by belief.

God will eventually transform us into morally perfect and immortal beings. And this will produce the greatest and most enjoyable feelings of well-being that it is possible to have within the created reality. Paul is saying that we authentic believers have the definite certainty that we will reach this goal—by God’s grace.

Thus, the word “hope” refers not to something that is only possible, but will eventually be actual. Typically, we “hope” for things that might possibly occur. But we are not 100% certain they will. Paul is talking about something that God guarantees—eternal life and moral perfection for authentic believers. Thus, like Abraham, who waited with belief and hope for what God had guaranteed him, a son, we wait with belief and hope for what God has guaranteed us through another of His promises to Abraham, complete forgiveness, moral perfection, and eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Romans 2:17 However, if you bear the name “Jew,” find security in the Covenant, boast (*καυχᾶσαι*) in God,

Romans 2:23 You who boast (*καυχᾶσαι*) in the Covenant, are you dishonoring God through your violation of the Covenant?

1 Corinthians 1:29 so that no man may boast (*καυχῆσθαι*) before God.

1 Corinthians 1:31 so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD (ὁ *καυχόμενος* ἐν κυρίῳ *καυχάσθω*).”

1 Corinthians 3:21 So then let no one boast (*καυχάσθω*) in men. For all things belong to you,

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast (*καυχᾶσαι*) as if you had not received it?

¹²² οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχόμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν, εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται – Here is the third implication of justification by belief. It is one thing to brag, boast, and find personal significance now because of the glorious future as Paul talked about in the previous verse. It is another to find meaning and joy now in difficult and painful circumstances. The world urges us to find our significance in things they find great and glorious now—the size of our bank accounts, our accomplishments in business, our accomplishments in sports, our accomplishments in the arts, our status in society, our power in politics, etc. Instead, Paul states that a result of justification by faith is that we find our meaning and value in suffering, in the difficult circumstances of life that bring us heartache and pain and could destroy our faith in God’s being good and loving. This is not because we love the pain, but because we observe and enjoy God’s miraculous effects in the midst of our suffering. The first effect he mentions is the perseverance of our belief in God and in Jesus as the crucified Messiah. It is certainly natural that suffering causes us to question God’s goodness and love for us. How could a loving God allow His children to undergo extensive pain as demonstrated by human history and our own lives? Does He not seem more like an angry Father than a loving Father? But Paul is saying that God miraculously causes His children’s faith to endure all their pain and suffering (*κατεργάζεται* = produces). And this miracle then becomes the most encouraging evidence of not only God’s existence, but also His loving faithfulness and commitment to those whose hearts He has changed.

Therefore, it makes sense that the second use of ἡ θλίψις in this verse and the fact that it is singular refers not to the difficult circumstances that are causing suffering, but to the internal stress on a person’s belief that these circumstances are producing. We can imagine stress of such a great intensity that it crushes our belief in God and His promises. Paul is arguing that, BY VIRTUE OF GOD’S GRACE, He never allows stress to destroy an authentic believer’s inward orientation towards Him and the consequent belief in Him, Jesus, divine mercy, and eternal life. In other words, God’s grace is always there within a believer to make sure that his belief survives the ravages of hardship, pain, suffering, and stress.

¹²³ ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμὴν, ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα – In this verse Paul continues with the miraculous effects that God brings about for His children in the midst of our pain and suffering. First, as Paul stated in the previous verse, there is the perseverance of our belief by which we are justified before God. As stated above, we can easily think that in hard times, Christians will question God’s love to the extent that, if the pain is great enough, they will give up believing in His love, His goodness, and His eternal mercy and life. Indeed, we can imagine someone going so far as to despise God because of his suffering. However, God will miraculously produce by His grace persevering belief in authentic Christians. They will continue to count on God’s goodness, love, and mercy in spite of their suffering, even in the face of death. But only God can cause this kind of faith to persevere. Paul expects the reader to insert the assumed verb of *κατεργάζεται* (= produces) from the previous statement. Thus, secondly, God will miraculously produce, create, and cause by His grace such a quality of belief that it will be clear evidence to the Christian himself that he has biblical and authentic faith. In other words, God uses affliction and His causing a person’s belief to endure it to attest to the fact that his faith is that of justification, i.e., that it is truly genuine. This is similar to the story of Abraham in Genesis 22 who was tested by God when He commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac. When Abraham was willing to do so, God said, “Now I know that you believe in Me with genuine belief” (see Genesis 22:12-18). God persistently and consistently does the same with us. Thus, once God causes the person’s belief to endure, it provides adequate evidence and proof that his belief is genuinely biblical and authentic.

Thirdly, and again providing the assumed verb *κατεργάζεται* (= produces), God will miraculously move us believers on the evidence of our authentic belief to wait expectantly and confidently for that which God has guaranteed to us—eternal life and forgiveness in the Kingdom of God. We Christians will do this instead of giving up on this ultimate promise of God to Abraham and his spiritual descendants. Because biblical belief is ultimately about trusting God for mercy and eternal life, the suffering person’s authentic belief includes this very element, even to the point where the confident expectation of eternal life may be the only thing that we have. We may have lost everything else in this world and be in the process of losing our lives, but we have our biblical belief and God’s promise of mercy and citizenship in the eternal Kingdom of God. And so by God’s grace we hold on to

this hope and wait expectantly for it.

¹²⁴ ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς οὐ κατασχύνει, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου τοῦ δοθέντος ἡμῖν – What if we Christians wait and wait for God to fulfill His promise of eternal life, and He does something else to us, even condemns us for their sins? This obviously would be highly disappointing and embarrassing for us. During the course of our lives we spoke confidently to ourselves and to the world that God will faithfully bless us with salvation and eternal life, because we trusted His scriptures to reveal the truth. But then He does something else instead, because God has lied about His promises. What fools we would be, the laughingstock of the rest of the world. But Paul comments that waiting expectantly for eternal life will not turn out to be a disappointing or embarrassing thing. It will not bring us shame. Because our confidence is grounded in the fact that God is true and because He has loved each of us Christians by pouring out His Spirit in our hearts. In other words, it is the Spirit who keeps us going and persevering in our Christianity in the midst of life's trials and tribulations. He causes our faith to remain in existence and persevere when it might seem as though life's hardships and circumstances would crush it. And it is God within us who causes us to recognize the clear evidence of our faith when it perseveres and moves us to confidence and looking forward to the outcome of our lives—salvation and eternal life! While Christians will find themselves afflicted and even persecuted in this world, just as Jesus was, they nevertheless will not be ashamed by the result—life in the eternal Kingdom of God with Jesus.

Thus, the Holy Spirit is not only a vital manner by which God loves each of us individually, but He also becomes an important component of God's making us aware of just how much He loves us. He opens our minds and hearts to the truth of the perseverance of our faith and its eternal effect.

In the light of the incredible value of waiting expectantly for eternal life, it is most worthwhile for Christians to remember that we are now experiencing only a temporary existence, while the "glory of God" with its moral perfection and emotionally satisfying circumstances in the Kingdom of God will be eternal.

Paul could be talking about the content of hope, that eternal life will not be disappointing or embarrassing. But the above seems more likely, that he is referring to hope's not being false and empty when God does not fulfill His promises.

¹²⁵ Ἐτι γὰρ Χριστὸς ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν ἔτι κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν – Speaking of God's manner of loving sinners, now Paul explains an additional and necessary way that He has. While we were still weak, helpless, and completely incapable of reconciling ourselves to God so as to avoid His anger and judgment, the Messiah Jesus died on behalf of those who remain not only helpless throughout their lives but also opposed to God, so that they desperately need someone to intercede on their behalf in order to obtain His eternal mercy (at least the way that God has set up reality in the story which He is telling). When Paul and his fellow Christians were alive before Jesus even appeared on the scene around A.D. 27-30, they were morally weak to the extent that they were completely incapable in and of themselves to motivate God to grant them eternal mercy. They could not change their own hearts or muster up the proper belief and obedience to God to qualify for His forgiveness. They were truly "ungodly," which is to say that the Greek word ἀσεβῶν refers to the moral condition of human beings that cause them to be anti-God, that is, fundamentally against and opposed to the one true God, even if they think they are being obedient to Him by following the Mosaic Covenant or any part of biblical morality *with their own strength and ability*. Nevertheless, Jesus suffered death on the cross in order to qualify to be the high priest and advocate before God of helpless, ungodly, but authentic believers. This is the point of the letter by the author of Hebrews.

And Paul and his fellow sinners had done nothing to warrant Jesus' dying for them in order to rescue them from God's condemnation and destruction.

¹²⁶ μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθάνειται ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τάχα τις καὶ τολμᾷ ἀποθάνειν – Paul says parenthetically that it certainly makes sense that someone would sacrifice his life for a morally perfect person who has actually earned the right to live (ὑπὲρ δικαίου) rather than for a serial killer who deserves to die. Similarly, Paul is saying that it makes more sense that Jesus, the king of the universe, would die for morally perfect human beings (ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) rather than for those who have rebelled against and remain rebellious against God.

He is implying that we sinners must look very carefully and seriously at Jesus' death in order to grasp the situation in which our sinful condition places us. Jesus' death as our propitiatory offering communicates that we deserve only death and destruction from God. Therefore, the profundity of the potential effect of our sin points to the profundity of God's and Jesus' actions on our behalf, as Paul will now go on to say.

¹²⁷ συνίστησιν δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός, ὅτι ἔτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν – Dying on behalf of sinners (ἀμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν) who deserve eternal death is truly an act of love. This is what God has demonstrated of His own love towards us (συνίστησιν δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός) by requiring of the Messiah Jesus that he suffer crucifixion in order to qualify to intercede for us (Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν) before God and obtain His mercy.

¹²⁸ πολλῶ οὖν μᾶλλον δικαιοθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς – Continuing with the idea of how much God has loved us by having Jesus' die for us, Paul now comments on the strong connection between his death and our rescue from God's anger, condemnation, and destruction. Indeed, if a sinner obtains a standing before God whereby he will receive His forgiveness (δικαιοθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ), how much more certain (πολλῶ οὖν μᾶλλον) will the sinner

escape God's wrath and obtain this forgiveness (σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς).

And it will all be by means of Jesus' shedding his blood and dying on the cross (ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ). If his death brings justification and the promise of forgiveness, then his intercession on our behalf because he has died will all that much more insure that we are saved from God's wrath. Thus, we believing sinners obtain God's forgiveness through Jesus' having qualified by his death to be our advocate at the final judgment. And, thus, all the more reason we will escape God's anger and condemnation which we deserve and which Paul first mentioned in Romans 1:18ff. This is why our "hope" (waiting confidently and expectantly) will not result in our being ashamed (see 5:5)—because it will be realized in our obtaining the joy and fulfillment of God's eternal mercy and life in the Kingdom of God.

¹²⁹ εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ – Another way of saying that Jesus' death is a wonderful demonstration of God's love that makes our salvation certain is for Paul comment on how we begin this life as God's enemies, become His friends through Jesus' death and our belief, and end up acquiring the greatest gift which God can bestow on human beings, eternal life.

In other words, our greatest enemy is not Satan, or any human being who might even kill us. Our greatest enemy is God, and the only way to become His friends is to have His Son, the Messiah, reconcile us (κατηλλάγημεν) to Him by having died on the cross so that he qualified to be our advocate at the judgment. Our belief in Jesus has made us God's friends. He will never be disposed to get angry with us and destroy us. His only plan for us is eternal life, the same life that Jesus now enjoys after his death and resurrection. As Paul stated in the previous verse that justification by faith means that there is all the more reason that we will escape God's anger, so also becoming God's friends by having through Jesus' death and intercession means that there is all the more reason we will gain "his life," Jesus' existence of eternal life. We will live with him in the same condition as he—as eternal and morally perfect human beings.

The difficult step for God has been to turn His enemies into His friends through Jesus' death. The easy step will be to grant His friends eternal life now that He has reconciled them to Himself through Jesus' death and their belief.

Another example of ἐν meaning into and not in is 1 Timothy 2:14, "Now, Adam was not deceived. While the wife was being deceived, he came [fell] into transgression."

¹³⁰ οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δι' οὗ νῦν τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν – If God has loved us so much as demonstrated by Jesus' death and its effect for believers (and by the Spirit's work in our hearts that has produced authentic belief and obedience to God's moral commandments), it only makes sense that Paul say that he boasts, brags, rejoices, exults, and finds his personal significance in God, in view of the fact that Jesus fulfills the role that he does as savior. It is by means of Jesus and on the basis of Jesus, whom God gave the responsibility of dying on the cross, that we have changed from being God's enemies to being His friends with the guaranteed outcome of eternal salvation from God's wrath, plus the guaranteed outcome of eternal life with Jesus.

Once we fully grasp how God is lovingly using Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah in our lives, then we can humbly embrace the personal significance, meaning, and joy that this brings us sinners in a world that cannot fulfill and satisfy us because of its moral corruption and commitment to worshipping the creation instead of the Creator and because of our own moral corruption that continues to torpedo our sense of well-being.

It is also interesting that Paul ends this section with the concept of reconciliation (τὴν καταλλαγὴν) and says that we have now (νῦν) received it. For Paul, escaping the status of being God's enemy and becoming His friend is what human existence is all about.

In addition, Paul is ending this short section with the concept of boasting in God as the ultimate boast of an authentic believer. He had mentioned that the self-righteous and misguided Jew, who is even an ardent student of the OT, also boasts in God and in His Covenant. But this Jew does so without genuine belief (see 2:17,23). He is still God's enemy as Paul had been before his conversion on the road to Damascus when Jesus met him there.

¹³¹ Διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ δι' ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσηλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον – In this section of 5:12-21, Paul uses three words (ἁμαρτία, παράβασις, παράπτωμα) to refer to human beings' sin that leads through judgment (κρίμα) to both condemnation (κατάκριμα) and eternal death (θάνατος), while he uses four words (χάρισμα, χάρις, δωρεὰ, δώρημα) to refer to God's solution of the just penalty exacted of death on Jesus (δικαίωμα) and its resultant justification (δικαιοσύνη, δικαίωσις) and eternal life (ζωή, ζωὴ αἰώνιος) to the problem of our sin. It is also theologically important that the opposite of human sin is not human goodness, but God's grace, because it takes His grace to rescue us from His condemnation and the deserved eternal destruction and not our human effort of making ourselves worthy of His salvation. As Paul pointed out in 5:1-11, our personal worth as sinful human beings comes from God, His work within us in the midst of our suffering that tests our faith, and the hope that we choose to have in His fulfilling His promise to grant us eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Here Paul begins drawing another conclusion where he again wants to show the value and importance of Jesus the Messiah as the only acceptable propitiatory offering to God, and therefore the only acceptable priest before God, and therefore the only basis for solving our problem of sin and its eternal consequences (see Romans 3:25ff.). He is doing this by comparing two men, Adam and Jesus, and their effect on other human beings. Paul points out that Adam was the avenue by which evil and eternal death entered into the realm of human existence. In addition, he says that the problem of being condemned by God and suffering eternal destruction became the resultant experience of all human beings, simply because they all were sinful like Adam and deserved this

kind of “death.” However, Paul breaks off from finishing his sentence, whereby he would say that, “much more” certainly (πολλῷ μᾶλλον – see 5:9,10,15,17), Jesus was the avenue by which justification/forgiveness “entered into the world” and eternal life “entered through justification,” and thus “eternal life spread to all men (who were graced by God with an inward change that made them authentic believers in truth),” because “all (with changed hearts) believed truth” and escaped God’s condemnation and destruction.

Here is how Paul would have finished the sentence, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death entered through sin, and thus death spread to all men, in regard to which all sinned, [so also through one man justification entered into the world, and life entered through justification, and thus life spread to all men, in regard to which all were justified].”

It makes the most sense that, with the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον, the masculine (and probably not neuter) pronoun ᾧ refers to the masculine ὁ θάνατος just before it. Paul is saying that “in regard to death” all sinned, which is to say that death results from sin as a natural and legal result under the sovereign justice of God. In other words, sin deserves death, indeed eternal death. And since “all men” sinned after Adam, because this is simply the way God designed reality, then “all men” deserve “death.”

¹³² ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ, ἁμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου – Paul stops in the middle of his comparison of Adam and Jesus to comment that sin and rebellion against God with their consequence of eternal death do not need the written Torah, specifically the Mosaic Covenant and all its 613 individual and explicit commandments, to give them validity. In other words, just because people do not have God’s explicit instructions about the nature of reality and God’s explicit instructions of the moral commandments to the Jews for how they should be His people, whereby someone can list exactly what they are doing wrong in comparison to stated commandments (ἁμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου), neither are they excused from their sin against God and the eternal destruction that they deserve. The implication is that it is just as easy to recognize evil simply by being aware of one’s own moral nature and ontology as well as observing human behavior, indeed our own inward and outward moral nature and behavior, as creatures who have a moral sense, created by God to be able to discern good from evil even without God’s written explicit instructions about Himself and moral commandments.

This is what Paul argued in Romans 1 and 2 and what he will declare even about himself in Romans 7, that “sin dwells” in him and “evil is present” in him. Human beings are just wicked, evil, and sinful, and they all know it and that they deserve God’s eternal condemnation and death as their punishment for their willful violations of His moral commandments!

¹³³ ἀλλὰ ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδὰμ ὃς ἐστὶν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος – Paul continues in this parenthetical explanation and admits that Adam heard God’s explicit instruction in the Garden of Eden—not to eat of the particular tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2). Therefore, it makes sense that God blamed him for his sin against Him and His explicit commandment. However, Paul also says that people to whom God never spoke directly and gave a specific commandment were held accountable for their evil and suffered destruction as a result of the justice and condemnation that He has the right to execute towards them—if he does not change their hearts and cause them to become authentic believers, which is the condition He has placed on sinful human beings in order for them to escape His justice.

In other words, not having any explicit instructions or commandments from God did not prevent people who lived between the time of Adam and Moses, who wrote down the first part of God’s Torah, the Pentateuch of Genesis through Deuteronomy, from being subject to His judgment, condemnation, and destruction—because they were sinners and had the self-awareness of knowing so. Existentially, they could have repented and chosen to pursue righteousness, but for the most part they did not—because God had not chosen to change the hearts of all of them.

Two options for the meaning of “the prototype of what was to come”—

1) Adam’s willful transgression of God’s explicit commandment not to eat of the tree was the model of Jesus’ willful obedience to God’s commandment to die on the cross. Adam as an individual sinner was the model for Jesus as an individual righteous man and Messiah.

2) Adam’s willful transgression of God’s explicit commandment not to eat of the tree was the model of the willful disobedience of sinners who lived between Adam and Moses. Adam as an individual sinner was the model for all other sinful human beings who subsequently copied him by rebelling against God and, therefore, will suffer eternal death as a consequence if God does not extend His mercy to them.

In the immediate context of vs. 13 & 14, #2 seems to make more sense, that Adam, with the evil and death that spread to all other human beings because of his being the first to demonstrate explicitly his rebellion against God and the commandment He gave him, was the model of future sinners, whether between the time of Adam and Moses, or after the time of Moses.

But that God used Adam and his example of explicit sin that resulted in eternal death for his fellow sinners to bring about Jesus and his explicit obedience that resulted in eternal life for Adam’s fellow sinners also makes sense in the whole context of vs. 12-21. Adam was the prototype and model of sinful human beings, while Jesus was made, in a sense, in the likeness of Adam and became the model and source of salvation for sinful human beings. I’m inclined to think that it is a combination of the two options to which Paul is referring. Consequently, I think that this little section is more about comparing Adam with Jesus. Therefore, it makes more sense as a result of the coherence of the paragraph to interpret Paul as referring to Jesus, who copied Adam, not by sinning, but by responding with perfect obedience to God in such a way that he brought justification/forgiveness and eternal life to people. Just as Adam brought sin and eternal death into the arena of human existence, so Jesus brought justification and eternal life into the same arena.

Again, the implication is that God has planted in every human being enough self-awareness and knowledge of morality and sin

not only to hold each one accountable, but also so that every person has a valid sense of needing to escape his sinfulness and God's justice and to obtain His mercy (see Romans 1).

παράβασις – This word, along with παράπτωμα in the next verse, seems to be completely synonymous with ἁμαρτία = sin. They all three refer to deviating/departing from and going outside the boundary of God's moral standards and requirements for human beings. For example...

Romans 2:23 You who boast in the Covenant, are you dishonoring God through your violation of the Covenant (διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου)?

Romans 4:15 In addition, the Covenant produces wrath. But where there is no Covenant, neither is there transgression (παράβασις).

¹³⁴ Ἄλλ' οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα· εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἢ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῆ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσεν – Even though Adam and his singular rebellion against God were the model for Jesus and his singular obedience to God, the effect of Jesus is that much greater and certain for human beings who experience it. In this way, the “gracious gift” (χάρισμα) of God's salvation of sinners through Jesus is “not like the transgression” (οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα). In other words, the two are similar, but the great abundance of grace in the midst of the many (not just one) sins of the many sinners goes far and beyond what the just punishment of God's justice is towards sinners. If a human being sins once against God, he deserves eternal death. If a human being sins multiple (a gazillion) times against God, he will result eternal life through Jesus' death and his authentic belief in his death as a sacrificial offering for him.

Thus, Paul now goes back to his main point in this section, that Adam as “one man” and Jesus as “one man” are not only similar in their actions and effects on mankind, but they are actually very much different too. Indeed, Jesus' effect is “much more” (πολλῶ μᾶλλον – see 5:9,10,15,17). Thus, Paul is making an explicit comparison between the gift that God gives to human beings of His mercy and the “gift” that Adam gave to humanity through his rebellion against God. On the one hand, the effect on all the rest of humanity of Adam's evil and consequent death was truly abundant, because all men committed evil just as he did and came to deserve God's measured condemnation and eternal destruction. On the other hand, the effect on humanity of God's work of grace through Jesus the Messiah to rescue evil human beings from His eternal condemnation was even more abundant. **Grace** is the key element in God's theology of saving people from His eternal destruction, and its effect is “much more” than the effect of the key element in God's theology of destroying people, His justice, as Paul will go on to explain. This is why God's work of grace through Jesus is “not like the transgression” of Adam, because it is “more” than God's work of justice towards sinners.

I think that we can hear Paul's concern that people will somehow think that they can do enough righteousness for God to make themselves worthy of His mercy and salvation—as was the case in the erroneous Judaism that he once held. He is concerned that, in the midst of their sinfulness, people will look to themselves for what makes it worthwhile for God to save them and grant them eternal life. Instead, the only thing that people receive from God that they can make themselves worthy of is His justice, condemnation, and punishment. We definitely earn God's justice, but God graciously grants His mercy and salvation to those who can never earn them.

Romans 5:16 In addition, the free gift (τὸ δῶρημα) is not like that which happened through the one who sinned. On the one hand, there is judgment by virtue of one transgression that leads to condemnation. On the other hand, there is the gracious gift (χάρισμα) that arises out of many transgressions that would lead to a just penalty (δικαίωμα).

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift (χάρισμα) of God is eternal life in the Messiah Jesus our Lord.

Romans 11:29 because the gracious gifts (τὰ χαρίσματα) and calling of God are irrevocable.

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions (ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασιν) and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

The word παράπτωμα is used also in Romans 5:16,17,18 & 20.

Romans 5:17 Thus, if death ruled the day because of one man, because of the transgression of the one man, much more certainly those who receive the grace and the gift of justification that are in excess of the expected amount (τὴν περισσειάν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης) shall reign supreme in life because of the one man, Jesus the Messiah.

Romans 3:24 so that they are justified as a gift by means of His grace (τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι) in the light of the redemption by means of the Messiah Jesus.

¹³⁵ καὶ οὐχ ὡς δι' ἐνὸς ἁμαρτήσαντος τὸ δῶρημα· τὸ μὲν γὰρ κρίμα ἐξ ἐνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων εἰς δικαίωμα – Here is the “more abundant” nature of Jesus' obedience to God in comparison to Adam's disobedience of God.

Since ἐνὸς is either masculine or neuter, there are two options for the phrase ἐξ ἐνὸς —

1) “by virtue of the one who sinned,” i.e., Adam

2) “by virtue of the one transgression” (παράπτωμα) of “the one who sinned”

I am inclined to think that Paul is contrasting the “judgment” (κρίμα) with the “gracious gift” (χάρισμα). The former can occur as a result of one sin, while the latter covers many sins. Therefore, he is referring to #2, “the one transgression,” and not to #1, “the one sinner,” i.e., Adam, which is why I have translated it “by virtue of one transgression.”

In the case of Adam, all it took was for him to rebel against God explicitly once, and he deserved God's wrath and eternal condemnation that would come through the “judgment” (κρίμα) of God. But in the case of God's gift of salvation, it solves the

problem for human beings even when their sins and offenses against God are many. Justice that leads “to condemnation” (εις κατάκριμα) and eternal death requires only one violation of morality in order for this to happen. In contrast, mercy in the case of sinners who commit many sins covers their many violations of God’s moral commandments that would also lead to the just penalty of eternal condemnation. “One” sin leads to eternal condemnation, and “many” sins lead to eternal condemnation. Justification through Jesus covers “one” sin or “many” sins. But the fact that it covers “many” sins, which is the case with all sinners, means that it is that much more effective existentially than God’s justice.

Also, I think that δικαίωμα is not referring to justification but to the just penalty of sin, while the other words of δικαιοσύνη and δικαιοσύνης in this immediate section do refer to justification.

Thus, one sin can result in “the just penalty” (δικαίωμα) of eternal condemnation, and the same is certainly true of many sins. The point that Paul is making is that God’s gracious gift of salvation is in light of the many sins of the people in the world. Consequently, God’s gift is in the light of many sins while His condemnation is in the light of only one sin—in the case of Adam and would be the same for all other sinful human beings. In this way, the free gift of justification, forgiveness, and eternal life that by definition comes in the midst of many sins is “not like” God’s justice and eternal destruction that can result from either one sin or many sins.

Clearly, Paul wants to highlight and emphasize the abundant nature of grace and mercy in comparison to the singular nature of justice and condemnation, because he wants to pound into his readers’ heads just how loving and gracious God has been to them! The word κατάκριμα occurs only here in the NT and in 5:18 and 8:1 –

Romans 5:18 Therefore, just as because of one transgression there was condemnation (κατάκριμα) for all men, thus, also, in connection with one just punishment there is justification leading to life for all men.

Romans 8:1 The result is that there is now no sentence of death/condemnation (κατάκριμα) for those who are in the Messiah Jesus,

¹³⁶ εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἐνός, πολλῶ μᾶλλον οἱ τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύσουσιν διὰ τοῦ ἐνός Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – Continuing with the comparison and contrast of the idea of one vs. many, Paul says that, if condemnation in the form of “death” as eternal destruction is the measured, consequent result of even one violation of God’s moral commandments by human beings (τῷ τοῦ ἐνός παραπτώματι), then, “much more certainly” (πολλῶ μᾶλλον), eternal life is the unmeasured resulting effect of many violations of God’s moral commandments’ being forgiven by God through His grace and the free gift of justification (τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης) that comes from the role of Jesus the Messiah (διὰ τοῦ ἐνός Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) who obeyed God specifically to be the means and basis by which He would grant His grace and justification/forgiveness to people who did not deserve them.

Therefore, the eternal death of destruction “reigned supreme” among evil people by being their potential destiny, while formerly evil people will “reign supreme” in the eternal “life” of the Kingdom of God with the Messiah after they have received God’s grace, justification, resurrection or ascension, forgiveness, mercy, and life.

Again, notice the various words of contrast in this verse— παραπτώματι, χάριτος, δωρεᾶς, δικαιοσύνης .

Romans 3:21ff. – here Paul first mentioned explicitly this salvation and forgiveness that comes as a gift of God according to His grace and through the Messiah.

Revelation 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

¹³⁷ Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι’ ἐνός παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι’ ἐνός δικαιώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς – Now Paul mentions a similarity between the two situations of Adam and Jesus. Both sin/transgression with its result of eternal condemnation and death and forgiveness/justification with its result of eternal life entered into the world through a single human action by each of two individuals.

In the first case, Adam demonstrated his innate sinfulness against God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which deserved eternal condemnation and death, so that all who similarly rebelled against God with one or more sinful actions also deserved eternal condemnation and death.

In the second case, Jesus demonstrated his innate perfect obedience to God by dying on the cross, thus with one action exhibiting the just punishment and penalty of death that all sinners deserve, so that all who believe in him obtain eternal mercy and life.

Adam’s one act was followed by all other human beings’ emulating his sin and willful violation of God’s moral commandments, so that they all obtained the potential for God’s condemnation and eternal destruction.

Jesus’s one act when he died on the cross made it possible for human beings to find justification and acquittal for their willful sinfulness before God as a result of his advocacy at the final judgment.

One act led to eternal condemnation for potentially all humanity who followed Adam’s example, and one act led to justification and eternal forgiveness for all humanity potentially. But we know that it will be only those who believe in Jesus as their Messiah and advocate who will obtain eternal mercy and life.

Again, I think that δικαίωματος in this verse refers to “just penalty,” indeed the just penalty of sin that Jesus displayed when he died on the cross. And δικαίωσιν in this verse refers to justification which people receive from God through belief in Jesus as the crucified Messiah. So “sin” (παραπτώματος) results in condemnation (κατάκριμα) and death, while the “just penalty”

(δικαιώματος) of Jesus' own death results in justification (δικαίωσιν) and life (ζωής).

¹³⁸ ὡςπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί. οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί – Here are more contrasting terms to support Paul's argument regarding the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus. In line with what Paul said in v. 18, the disobedience (τῆς παρακοῆς) of the one act by Adam resulted in all human beings' becoming sinful sinners like him (ἁμαρτωλοὶ), (because this is simply the way that God designed reality, that Adam and Eve's descendants, except for Jesus, would be sinners like them, not through any physical causation, e.g., of their DNA, but through the manner that He tells their stories). Similarly, yet differently, the perfect obedience (τῆς ὑπακοῆς) of the one morally perfect act of Jesus (in contrast to Adam's sinful act) results in as many human beings as God wants becoming justified (δίκαιοι) so that they stand to inherit His mercy and eternal kingdom. Another possibility is that δίκαιοι could mean "righteous" and "morally perfect," so that Paul is looking to the distant future when all authentic believers will become morally perfect like Jesus in the Kingdom of God. And this, too, seems to make sense as a contrast to the word ἁμαρτωλοὶ, which means sinners, i.e., morally imperfect people. But the previous context is more about what people become in this life through Adam's sin and Jesus' righteous act—sinners in the first case and justified in the second case. It is also about how people come to a point in their existences where they stand to inherit eternal life in contrast to how they come to a point in their life where they stand to incur God's just penalty after condemnation.

¹³⁹ νόμος δὲ παρεισήληθεν. ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα· οὐ δὲ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία. ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις – Paul had said in 5:13 that "sin is definitely not charged to one's account where there is no Covenant." Now he develops this idea further by declaring that God's purpose for giving the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews and, by implication, the written Torah through Moses (and other authors) to the Jews and the rest of humanity is so that everyone's sin could be "charged to his account," thus "increasing" sin by virtue of its being that much more obvious and apparent. This is how I am interpreting "that sin increase." Paul is not saying that actual day to day sin within human beings and by human beings became greater when God gave the Torah and even the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews, as if the Covenant supercharged their sinfulness and caused them to pursue it more aggressive and produce it more than they were before they encountered the Covenant, because people were (and still are) already so sinful to the extent that they all deserved (and deserve) God's condemnation and destruction (see Romans 1:18ff. and Romans 7). Therefore, he must mean something different, i.e., that their sin became that much more explicit, obvious, plain, clear, apparent, and beyond any doubt in existence when the Torah and Mosaic Covenant came along and it was even written down by Moses. The 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant make it very clear that sin exists to a large degree in human beings. But people have to have eyes to see the depth of their sin, which comes about only by virtue of God's causation through the inner work of His Spirit in their hearts.

So this is like the laws of any country or political entity. Violation of them is not so clear if the laws are not written down and explicitly proclaimed to them. But once they are written and proclaimed, to break any one of them is now clear and obvious, so that someone's receiving a just penalty for violating a law is altogether much clearer and makes total sense—as long as the laws themselves are just and appropriate, i.e., in line with God's moral requirements. Plus, in the case of the Jews and the Mosaic Covenant, their violating the individual commandments of it did not reveal just that individual violation as an individual sin. Instead, it revealed their sinfulness, i.e., their natural born sinful nature that is the root of their moral problem before God and that results in His eternal condemnation and the destruction of their existences.

Fortunately, God's gracious mercy trumps the increased exposure and revealing of sin and sinfulness that the Torah and Mosaic Covenant bring about. When God desires grace to win in the face of sin's being revealed by the Covenant, He looks to Jesus' qualifying to become sinners' high priest by dying on the cross and He changes the heart of a sinful Jew (or any other human being) through His Spirit, so that He causes this person to believe the biblical message authentically and to seek His mercy, especially through the promise of the advocacy of the Messiah at the final judgment that speaks to their inner sinfulness which they cannot stop or correct.

Notice again the contrasting terms—παράπτωμα, ἁμαρτία, χάρις.

Galatians 3:19, "So why the Covenant? It was set forth because of transgressions up to the time that the 'seed' to whom the promise had been made arrived on the scene, having been ordained through divine theophanies by the hand of a mediator."

Hebrews 7:11, "Therefore, if indeed complete confidence were through the Levitical priesthood (for the people have been given the Covenant on the basis of it), then why was there yet the need for a different priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not to be called according to the order of Aaron?"

¹⁴⁰ ἵνα ὡςπερ ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, οὕτως καὶ ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ διὰ δικαιοσύνης εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν – Sin is a powerfully effective force in human beings that inextricably leads to their eternal "death" of condemnation and destruction. Fortunately, God's grace is even more effective, so that it causes a sinful human being to be subject to it with its outcome of eternal forgiveness and life—even in the face of all his evil actions being listed and charged to his account according to the instructions of the explicit and written Mosaic Covenant from God.

And Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that allowed him to qualify to be our advocate at the judgment and our king in eternity becomes the basis and means by which grace can have this greater effect on many people with their many sins and evil actions, as Paul has been saying in 5:12-19—in contrast to the effect of God's justice on many people with simply their one evil action (if this were all they committed like Adam) for which they deserve His wrath and destruction.

Again, the important contrast here is not between sin and righteousness in a person, but between the sin in the person and the

grace which God extends to him in the midst of his sin and sinfulness. And obviously God's grace includes Jesus and all that he has done and will do to provide sinful human beings with eternal salvation from God's wrath, condemnation, and death/destruction.

¹⁴¹ Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἵνα ἡ χάρις πλεονάσῃ – Chapters 6-8 are Paul's defense against the accusation by Jews that the gospel provides no incentive to pursue morality because God is so profoundly merciful. In other words, if grace saves a sinner regardless of how much he has sinned and regardless of how much sin he is aware of, then grace cannot really motivate a person to pursue obedience to God—right? If anything, grace motivates a person to sin even more in order that God may be even more gracious than if he does not sin. Therefore, grace as Paul teaches it makes it seem as though it operates *no matter how a person lives* after becoming aware of both his sin and God's grace.

This criticism of Paul's gospel stems from his just having said in 5:12-21 that justification occurs in the midst of many sins and results in eternal life, while judgment occurs in the midst of one sin and results in condemnation and eternal death. Therefore, if there is no problem in God's granting justification and eternal life to those who sin many, many times (by virtue of the abundance of grace that God extends towards and in the sinner), then why not take advantage of God's graciousness and cause His grace to "increase" even more by our sinning more? Seems logical.

Several rhetorical questions now come to mind for Paul. Because he is writing to Gentile Christians in Rome who have not had to confront objections to Christianity from rabbinic Jews who focus on the Mosaic Covenant, he provides them with a defense against a few questions that these latter people would raise.

First, Paul has just made not only a rather negative comment about the central focus of rabbinic Jews in their relationship with God—the Torah with its Mosaic Covenant, but also a comment about the increase of grace, not justice, where rebellion against God increases, i.e., when, because of the explicit instructions of the Torah, an individual's evil actions can be easily listed on a piece of paper, for example, and the person becomes more aware of how many sins he has committed. In other words, ultimately, the Torah and the Mosaic Covenant are not the solution to the problem of evil and for people's gaining God's eternal mercy. The solution comes from God "independently of the Covenant" (see 3:21ff.)—through Jesus and his death and resurrection. And, while God displayed His justice plenty of times in the OT by punishing the Israelites for their disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant, so that they should be motivated to shun evil in order to avoid His justice, it is actually more important to grasp the tremendous significance of His grace and mercy in the presence of any source of massive evil, including one's own sinfulness (like Paul's, for example) and then be motivated to shun evil. This in no way provides a rationalization for evil, but should simply lead people to appreciate the abundant graciousness of grace. Thus, grace, mercy, and morality become the key attractive elements of obedience to God instead of focusing on the words and related actions of the individual commandments and avoiding God's justice and punishment described by the Torah and Mosaic Covenant.

In addition, Paul is implying that, by virtue of the fact that the Torah provides neither the promise of grace to ALL Jews down through history nor forgiveness at the final judgment through the advocacy of the Levitical priests, it can only reveal people's sinfulness and not provide the ultimate solution to it. Paul has also said that this increased awareness of evil on people's part in a sense means that God provides them with more grace than they formerly believed was necessary (see 5:17).

We can see how a Jew, who is upset by Paul's taking the focus off the Torah and Mosaic Covenant as the solution to man's evil, would latch on to his statement of grace's increasing where there is more evil that results in justification and life through belief in Jesus as the Messiah and asking Paul in a rather sarcastic tone, "Well, Paul, if God provides more grace (and justification and eternal life) through more evil (and not judgment, condemnation, and death), then why not just give Him even more opportunity to do what is marvelous and awesome of providing more grace by a person's continuing to pursue evil in his life?"

¹⁴² μὴ γένοιτο. οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ. πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ – Paul's answer to the rhetorical question from the hypothetical Jew is, how can death and life coexist?

But there are two options for how the translate and interpret οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ —

1) We who died to sin and therefore have the power and ability to avoid committing it altogether, i.e., we can be morally perfect by our faith and having become a Spirit-filled Christian

2) We who recognized in Jesus' death that which we deserve, eternal death, with no hope of escaping either sin or death by our own efforts through obeying the Mosaic Covenant that qualify us for God's blessing us with eternal life, and have made an inner commitment to face into the insoluble problem of our natural born sinfulness and to avoid sin with every fiber of our being (as God may grant us by the continuing work of His grace within us) because we acknowledge how evil and undesirable sin is
And there are two options for how to translate and interpret πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ —

1) How shall we still pursue a life of sin this side of eternity when we have come to understand how evil and undesirable it is because of what Jesus' death on the cross has demonstrated about sin

2) How shall we yet obtain life in the Kingdom of God in the midst of not caring about sin's awful nature and continuing to pursue it instead, because a life of willful and constant sin theologically cannot logically and biblically result in life

Either a person has one, or he has the other. And if sin and immorality is associated with death, then it cannot be associated with life. Plus, indeed, immorality is associated with death, as "we" (in the 1st century Roman Empire), who have become authentic believers, have declared. We cannot find eternal life by extolling and promoting immorality, only by "dying to it" through acknowledging it for what it is, evil that is to be avoided.

¹⁴³ ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν –

Probably one reasonable option for ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν — as many of us as were baptized in water when we confessed our genuine belief in the Messiah Jesus who died and rose from the dead to demonstrate what we sinners deserve and to become the one who intercedes on behalf of us sinners at the final judgment of God respectively

And one reasonable option for εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν — we became the kind of people who fully comprehend the significance of Jesus’ death and who make an inner commitment to avoid the consequence of death of sin by not only escaping God’s condemnation and eternal destruction of sinners through our belief in Jesus as our intercessor but also avoiding sin on an existential level during the rest of our lives on this earth before we die or Jesus returns

Thus, Paul refers to the common baptismal ceremony as the point when people demonstrated their understanding of the significance of Jesus’ death, that it pointed to their own sinfulness and morality depravity by which they deserved God’s eternal condemnation. Thus, to be “baptized into his death” is for a person to recognize and appreciate that his sinfulness and pursuit of existential sins naturally deserves eternal condemnation and death as displayed by Jesus’ dying on the cross and not with eternal life and God’s forgiveness, so that he inwardly commits himself to live the rest of his life by doing what is biblically and morally good as possible.

Paul will now continue explaining more explicitly how an accurate view of one’s water baptism in the light of Jesus’ death on the cross results in an existential turning away from sin in a person’s life and turning towards moral goodness as much as possible, i.e., as much as God’s grace allows in any one individual’s life.

¹⁴⁴ συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὡσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν –

If “baptism into [Jesus’] death” means recognizing the insoluble problem of our sin and that it results in eternal death under God’s justice, then being “buried with” Jesus means remaining convinced that sin is the worse kind of life to pursue and becoming completely settled in one’s mind, heart, and will that one should avoid sin in his life and existence as much as possible.

This being the case, then “just as the Messiah was raised from the dead,” and this resurrection glorified God by demonstrating His power and purposes of using Jesus as both an example of the consequences of sin and intercessor for sinners, “also we may walk in the newness of life” by pursuing biblical goodness as existing human beings who now are destined to obtain eternal life through God’s grace. This becomes our inward and settled commitment for how we live our lives.

Thus, Paul is saying that “our” water baptism results in our also being “buried with Jesus,” meaning that we have faced into our sin and have become committed to avoiding it because it would naturally result in God’s condemnation otherwise. This is to say that we acknowledge that we deserve only eternal destruction by God for our sinful and rebellious condition, which all was made manifest to us when Jesus died on the cross and was buried after he died. Similarly, Jesus then was raised from the dead into his new life with an immortal body from God. In accord with this part of Jesus’ experience, Paul is saying that believers transition from their acknowledgment of their deserving eternal destruction on the basis of their innate and humanly insoluble sinfulness to their living to acquire in the future a new life, an immortal and morally perfect one because of God’s grace and the process of salvation in which they now find themselves.

Baptism’s procedure of immersing people in water allows them to think of their immersing themselves in God’s and Jesus’ understanding and perspective on reality, that they hate sin and man’s sinfulness because of its eternally deadly effects, and they love morality because of its eternal effects of life—obviously, when coupled with authentic belief in a sinful human being.

Therefore, by grasping the advocacy aspect of the Messiah’s death on behalf of sinful human beings and the eternal life aspect of his resurrection afterwards, people adopt a new worldview whereby they see themselves as no longer committed fundamentally to evil as they had been before. Instead, they have a new perspective of heading towards eternal *life*, so that now they pursue an existence of goodness and morality as Jesus had lived on earth and that is line with their eventual destiny of moral perfection. Therefore, they “walk [conduct themselves now] in the newness of life [that they will experience fully later in the Kingdom of God].”

Paul is arguing that a person who has gone through this kind of intellectual and moral change should not want to and will not want to pursue evil as a lifestyle, even if the Mosaic Covenant’s main purpose is to increase the awareness of evil in people and even if God’s grace produces complete forgiveness for any amount of sin or awareness of sin in their lives.

[Galatians 2:20](#) “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.

¹⁴⁵ εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα –

Paul repeats the point of vs. 3 & 4.

If sinful human beings have come to recognize the insoluble and destructive nature of their sinfulness and evil through Jesus’ crucifixion and death, then they also will come to recognize the eternal life producing nature of their belief through God’s grace, such that they will possess the same kind of body as Jesus in his resurrection, one that is immortal and morally perfect [so that they inwardly commit themselves to living as much as possible like what they will be when they become morally perfect with Jesus in the Kingdom of God].

To grasp theologically, logically, spiritually, and morally the significance of Jesus’ death as a repudiation of sin and evil leads to

grasping the significance of his resurrection as an affirmation of the goodness of moral perfection that will be a key aspect of the eternal realm for human beings. A person then actually pursues that for which he ultimately hopes and will become by God's grace—moral perfection. In other words, there are necessary changes in a person's worldview and even inner motivations and commitments that come with God's causing someone to have a different inwardness from one enslaved strictly to sin and that far reduces the necessity of focusing only on the list of commandments of the Mosaic Covenant in order to be motivated to obey God in this life.

In addition, this fact of the future destiny of an authentic believer puts the abundance of God's grace in perspective. Regardless of how much he has sinned, Jesus' death and God's grace make it completely unreasonable that a person would think of increasing His grace by increasing his sin. (Nor would he think that his sin is so great that it is impossible for God to forgive him.) He is simply grateful for the grace and wants to live as much like what he will become in the Kingdom of God as possible and like Jesus—with goodness, kindness, love, truth, patience, and forgiveness towards others.

We become sinners who are on the same page as Jesus who understood the significance of his death and his resurrection.

¹⁴⁶ τοῦτο γινώσκοντες ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ –

Likening the sinful human being to a slave whose master is his sinfulness, Paul explains that this slave (the “old self”) knows that he dies (“was crucified”) when he comes to grips with the significance of Jesus' own crucifixion and death on the cross as representing what he deserves, so that he no longer is committed to obeying his immoral inclinations (his “body of sin” is “nullified”). By implication, he is a changed person (“no longer enslaved to sin”), one who is now committed (“enslaved”) to goodness and morality in the commitments of his mind and heart—in spite of his continued sinful and immoral condition. Besides having a certain future destiny of eternal moral perfection with Jesus, the believer has also been severed existentially from his slavery to sinfulness, not that his innate sin and immoral condition has disappeared, but that it no longer dominates his desires and the course of his life. Thus, to grasp the significance of Jesus' death is to realize and claim that our fundamental desire in life is no longer to live in line with our sinfulness, which, in effect, means that we no longer are intellectually and spiritually tied to our sinfulness in such a way that we must always give in to it and live in rebellion against God—as God's grace continues to work within our minds, hearts, and wills through leading our desires towards biblical righteousness.

Our “body of sin is nullified,” meaning that this human body that is characterized by slavery to sin is no longer that which sets the course of our lives and determines our eternal destiny. Instead, it is our fundamental desire for righteousness and eternal salvation that does. One could say that our heart of righteousness trumps our body of sin because of the inward change that God has produced through His Spirit.

¹⁴⁷ ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεικνύεται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας –

The sinful person, who has “died” by authentically grasping the significance of Jesus' death and, thereby, has repudiated evil and embraced authentic morality as Jesus did, has gone through an existential change inwardly from being dominated by evil whereby, by virtue of his “belief” which Paul talked about in previous chapters, he is “justified” and stands to be eternally forgiven by God and granted eternal life. Therefore, this death that Paul is talking about here in chapter 6 is part of the condition that God places on sinners to grant them eternal mercy.

¹⁴⁸ εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομεν ὅτι καὶ συζήσομεν αὐτῷ – Because we Christians have undergone a process of renouncing evil as that which we fundamentally want now in life and in eternity, because we have “died with the Messiah,” meaning that we have looked at Jesus' death on the cross and recognized and admitted to God that we deserve death for our sin and do not want death, “we believe” also that we will inherit the eternal Kingdom of God and the life there that will be characterized by moral perfection. Consequently, “we shall also live” in the morally perfect Kingdom of God “with” Jesus.

¹⁴⁹ εἰδότες ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθνήσκει, θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει – Jesus' own transition from physical death on the cross to life through God's resurrecting him meant that he would and could never die again. He was now an eternal morally perfect person, even though he had been a mortal (and having died!) morally perfect person. His experience within the created reality from that point on was going to be one of only life, even and especially in the eternal Kingdom of God. He had a mortal body before he died on the cross, and he acquired an immortal body after his death on the cross when God resurrected him. As a result, Jesus will never die again and be subject to death. And neither will we after we have died and been resurrected! Because of Jesus and our faith in him.

By associating with Jesus and his perspective on both morality and immortality that resulted in death and resurrection for him, we Christians have a confidence that we, too, will not be dominated by either sin in this life or its consequence of destruction and God's condemnation in the eternal realm.

¹⁵⁰ ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ· ὁ δὲ ζῆ, ζῆ τῷ θεῷ – The one-timeness (“once and never again”) of Jesus' experience with respect to death and resurrection means that he transitioned from one master of sorts to another. During his initial 30 or so years on earth, death on the cross always hung over his head. He was completely and perfectly subject to God as the morally perfect Messiah, but death still loomed in the distance—even for the future King of Israel and the eternal Kingdom of God. And his death was because of (“for”) the sinfulness of all other human beings, that he might be a propitiatory offering and obtain God's eternal mercy for them. However, after his resurrection, death no longer threatened him with its overtaking him as it

had on the cross. Now he had his immortal body and would remain in the condition of having it forever. Thus, his being subject to God perfectly after his resurrection did not involve even the possibility of death. It involved only the possibility of life “for” and from God.

Thus, it’s a big deal that Jesus “died” and that he died only once. God, the transcendent Story Teller, assigned to the Messiah the role that involves suffering and dying only once within created history. During his life, Jesus always looked forward to a future of strictly living and not dying. This is what it means for him to “live for God.” It is this once-ness of Jesus’ death that means also that Christians will face the dying and the possibility of God’s condemnation at the judgment only once. And, because Jesus is guaranteed to be their advocate at the judgment, they are guaranteed never having to face God’s judgment again once they enter into the eternal Kingdom of God through Jesus’ interceding for them, so that they are guaranteed to live morally perfectly like Jesus in his kingdom.

¹⁵¹ οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς εἶναι νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ – Similar to Jesus’ experience of transitioning from the inevitable threat of death on the cross because of man’s sin to only eternal and immortal life by God’s sovereign work, Christians should consider themselves as eventually going through the same kind experience of transitioning out of eternal death that they deserve because of their sinfulness to eternal and immortal life because of the effect that the Messiah will have on them by appealing to the Father for mercy on their behalf.

The effect of Jesus’ experience for the Christian is not only future in the eternal Kingdom of God, but it is also existential in the present realm. Similar to Jesus’ perspective now on the past and future as he “sits at the right hand of God” (Psalm 110:1, Hebrews 1:3, etc.), Paul’s Gentile Christian readers should pursue the kind of life that he leads now and that they will later perfectly, so that they look toward only obeying God and not pursuing evil for the rest of their existences as human beings—in both the present realm and the future realm.

This perspective is the only logical outcome for his Gentile readers of understanding the significance of their association with Jesus as the Messiah, which further means that any thought of trying to increase God’s grace by increasing the evil in one’s life is nonsense.

“Dead to sin” = repudiating sin as that which we know for sure that we do not want in any form within us or in our behavior because God has changed our hearts, faced us into the significance of Jesus’ death, and caused us to be revolted by our own sin
“living for God” = desirous of and making every effort to perform biblical righteousness because of our conversion from self-righteous sinners to humble, powerless in and of ourselves sinners

“in the Messiah Jesus” = associated with Jesus and all that a good understanding of him involves for a sinner this side of eternal life

¹⁵² Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ –

Here, Paul draws a conclusion. Because God has changed their hearts and they have faced into their sin and its consequence of death by properly grasping the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death on the cross, so that through the inner work of God’s grace they have become more desirous of being good people and obeying God than sinning against Him, Paul exhorts his Roman Christian readers not to allow sin to be their main pursuit so that they spontaneously give in to its strong desires.

The Mosaic Covenant with its moral commandments and threats of punishment is not what Paul is using here to motivate Christians to obey God. But this does not mean that he avoids commandments in the imperative mood altogether. Here he commands his Roman Christian readers to shun sin and pursue righteousness. Why? Because it only makes sense in the light of a person’s facing into his sin and its consequences by having looked at Jesus’ death on the cross and what it means—that we all deserve eternal death from God. He commands them not to let sin dominate them as it had before, which assumes now they have the desire (through God’s grace) to comply—even though they are not yet morally perfect and will continue to sin to some degree until God transforms them when He resurrects them or lifts them off the earth when Jesus returns.

In this way, we see the existential human element of a person who has been affected by the divine element of the Spirit of God. In other words, it is not just God who is involved in our making the choice pursue biblical morality after He has circumcised our hearts (Romans 2:28ff.) and poured out His Spirit in our hearts (Romans 5:5), but we are involved on the created, existential level of being rational, moral human beings who make real choices to do X or Y, to do good or evil.

¹⁵³ μηδὲ παριστάνετε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὄπλα ἀδικίας τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἀλλὰ παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ὡσεὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ζῶντας καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὄπλα δικαιοσύνης τῷ θεῷ – Continuing in the vein of appealing to his Roman Christian readers on an human, created existential level, Paul presents another part of his command to them is to pursue morality (“present their members”) as those who have gone through the existential transition of acknowledging and renouncing the sin and evil within them (“instruments of unrighteousness”) and grasping and embracing only biblical goodness as that which they should and now do fundamentally desire (“as living from the dead” and “instruments of morality/righteousness”), and, of course, which they will obtain only after they go through the same transition that Jesus did from a mortal (and dead) body to an immortal and eternal living body.

Paul urges and exhorts them to make conscious decisions to do what is good and right before God rather than to do evil as they had before. This is the only way to live that makes sense and follows both theologically and logically in the light of their associating themselves with the Messiah, his death, and his resurrection.

¹⁵⁴ ἁμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν – Paul now gets back explicitly to the point—that God’s grace and not the Mosaic Covenant *per se* is the proper motivator toward authentic goodness for the Christian. As he has said, the Covenant’s purpose is to increase a person’s awareness of his sin and to show him that sin is all that he does if God has not changed his heart, while grace’s purpose is to do the same and motivate a person towards authentic goodness through considering what Jesus went through on the cross when he died to rescue him from God’s eternal destruction. Indeed, Paul would make this comment about a person’s not being “under the Covenant” to Jewish Christians just as much he is to these Gentile Christians. In 5:20, he said that God introduced the Covenant into history in order to increase evil by virtue of its making more explicit their inherent sinfulness. Thus, every Christian, Jew or Gentile, is technically “under grace” and not “under the Covenant,” thus relativizing the importance of the Mosaic Covenant for eternal salvation purposes. Paul’s point is not to say to the Gentiles that they have no historical or earthly obligation to the moral commandments in the Covenant, but to say that all Christians cannot rely on the Covenant alone with their own human ability and efforts to be the solution to their problem of sin and deserving God’s eternal condemnation.

In other words, the Covenant alone was not intended to be God’s tool of eternal grace and thus has neither power nor place in a person’s life *per se* either to motivate people toward genuine goodness as sinful human beings or to solve their problem of being under God’s condemnation. Only God’s grace (according to the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant *as mentioned in the rest of the Hebrew scriptures*), working within human beings and their hearts, has the power and the place to do so—along of course with the intercession by the Messiah at the judgment through his death and resurrection (see Romans 3:21ff.). Consequently, by being those who are characterized by God’s grace in the midst of their sinfulness, as opposed to being characterized by only their sinfulness in the face of only the Mosaic Covenant, Paul’s Christian Gentile readers (and all Jewish believers) are no longer dominated by sin in their minds and their hearts. Their fundamental God-given desire now is to obey Him—because God has changed their inwardness!

“Sin will not dominate you” = by the grace of God and His work in your hearts, sin no longer solely motivates you and sets the course of your life and determines your destiny

“You are not under the Covenant” = you are not left alone with the Mosaic Covenant to seek to obey it properly, resulting in only sin that comes from your natural born humanity

“Under grace” = God is actively working within you by His sovereign plan and power to rescue you from His eternal condemnation and to motivate you to want and to do biblical goodness in your life as that which helps to demonstrate that you are an authentic follower of Jesus as the Messiah

¹⁵⁵ Τί οὖν; ἁμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν; μὴ γένοιτο – For those who were brought up to rely on the Mosaic Covenant and their obedience to it as that which determined whether or not God would respond to them with His blessing or His curse, it sounds a bit crazy to think that He makes a sovereign and independent decision to be gracious, merciful, and forgiving towards sinners, regardless of the quality and quantity of their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant—so that continuing to disobey the covenant seems irrelevant to God’s extending His grace to sinners.

Substitute the words “religious practices of Christendom” for “Mosaic Covenant,” and the same is true for people brought up within historical Christianity.

In the previous section, Paul relativized the Mosaic Covenant given to the Jews to the extent that it may seem that a person can ignore not only it, but also disobeying it and immorality—because, in the Jew’s mind, the Covenant and morality are inextricably tied together. The Jew grew up knowing only the Covenant as the basis for his relationship with God, and to switch this basis to only the Messiah and God’s grace is quite a psychological leap. In other words, for the Jew, you cannot have morality without the Covenant, and you cannot have immorality explained and held to a person’s account without the Covenant.

[But see Romans 2:11-16 – **2:11** Indeed, there is no favoritism with God. **2:12** Consequently, those who do evil outside the Covenant will indeed suffer destruction outside the Covenant, and those who do evil in the midst of the Covenant will also be judged by the Covenant. **2:13** It is not the hearers of the Covenant who are declared uncondemned before God, but it is those who are doers of the Covenant who will be declared uncondemned—**2:14** thus, whenever Gentiles, who do not have the Covenant [as something presented to them by God], do “naturally” the things of the Covenant, these, who do not possess the Covenant, are in fact a Covenant unto themselves; **2:15** they demonstrate the effect of the Covenant written on their hearts, while their understanding bears witness to this and their thoughts alternately accuse or even defend them **2:16**—especially on the day when God will judge the secrets of men, according to my good news, in light of the Messiah Jesus.]

Thus, Paul asks another rhetorical question, “Take away Covenant from its primary position as teacher and motivator towards morality, and does morality become an irrelevant concept under the gospel of grace and Messiah that Paul is teaching, so that committing sin and immorality is permissible as a Christian, especially because the free exercise by God of His *grace apart from the sinner’s performance of moral goodness* is actually what is saving a person from eternal destruction?”

Paul’s answer is an unequivocal no, as it was for the previous question.

If you take away the Mosaic Covenant from a Jew, with what is he left for understanding his relationship with God? Not much, especially if he has been taught that the Messiah, like the other teachers in Israel, would encourage the absolute necessity of basing his relationship with God on the Covenant. There is also the rest of OT Torah, but throughout it, the Mosaic Covenant is given primary attention, except perhaps for the Abrahamic promises in Genesis 12-22. But the Abrahamic promises appear to lack any real teeth with respect to God’s justice and mercy apart from the Mosaic Covenant.

See Deuteronomy 4:1, “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you

may live and go in and take possession of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you.”

Thus, Paul seems to be ripping the entire theological and divine-relational rug out from underneath the Jews. For them, the Mosaic Covenant is not only key to defining their relationship with God, but it also is *the* prime motivation not to do evil, because it not only defines morality and exhorts the Jews to pursue it, but it also threatens them with God’s retribution and justice if they disobey it—and with God’s blessings if they obey it. Take away the Covenant, and you psychologically take away the Jews’ main reason for obedience to God.

Therefore, Paul just seemingly eliminated the Mosaic Covenant as an important factor for not only the Gentile Christians in Rome but also all Christians, including those among the Jews. However, Paul is not saying that the Covenant is not important, but that no Christian is “under” the Covenant and reliant upon it solely through his innate obedience to it to solve his problem of sin so that he can receive God’s eternal mercy. In addition, no Christian is “under” the Covenant as that which is necessary to motivate him to obey God. Consequently, it would be easy for a Jew to hear what Paul is saying and conclude that it is permissible to pursue evil, because the Mosaic Covenant effectively does not exist for the Gentile Christian or even the Jewish Christian when it comes to obtaining God’s eternal mercy and pursuing morality. Only Jesus and God’s grace do.

Paul’s argument so far has been that identifying with Jesus’ death and resurrection is to agree with God’s and his evaluation of both sin and morality, that sin deserves death and should be avoided while morality is the only possible experience in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Now, Paul will go on to provide another motivation for pursuing moral goodness *apart from the Mosaic Covenant*—that a person’s pursuit makes him either a slave of the outcome of abject and total evil, i.e., eternal condemnation and death, or a slave of the outcome of morality (in the midst of authentic belief), i.e., forgiveness and eternal life.

¹⁵⁶ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ᾧ παριστάνετε ἑαυτοὺς δούλους εἰς ὑπακοήν, δούλοι ἐστε ᾧ ὑπακούετε, ἥτοι ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον ἢ ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην – Here in Romans 6 Paul describes the “deeds” as an inward slavish commitment to either moral goodness or sin, so that there are two moral possibilities for a sinful human as to whom he serves as a slave—

1) sin and willfully violating God’s moral commandments that leads to eternal death (ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον)

2) obedience and willfully pursuing obeying God’s moral commandments that leads to righteousness and eternal life (ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην)

And the fact is that the inward transition which God has caused within sinners when He changes their hearts leads them towards choosing righteousness instead of sin.

So here is Paul’s answer and reason why not having the Mosaic Covenant as the central of focus of one’s life does not allow a person to rationalize doing evil. It is because there is tremendous significance in the *kind of choices that a human being makes in regard to the moral direction and outcome of his life*, regardless of whether or not the Covenant is included in his thinking and motivation. If a person commits himself slavishly to pursuing sin that fundamentally characterizes the desires that arise from his sinfulness, i.e., if he does evil “because [he is] not under the Covenant but under grace,” then he will incur death = God’s justice and eternal destruction.

Paul had characterized humanity in Romans 1 as slaves of sin, whether or not they have ever been exposed to the Jewish scriptures. Thus, part of the implicit point here is that there is a definite inward transition that a person goes through when God’s grace is directed towards him for the purpose of his eternal salvation. And this transition permits a sinful human being to commit himself to being a slave of “righteousness” instead of a slave of “sin.” Consequently, if the person commits himself as a slave to pursuing obedience to God, i.e., if he pursues goodness and righteousness while not even thinking about the Covenant (but because he is thinking about God’s grace, Jesus’ death as the greatest expression of love and a demonstration of what he deserves, and his desire to escape both his sin and eternal condemnation), then he will receive God’s forgiveness with the result of eternal life and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God—while it is assumed that the only way a person can genuinely pursue goodness is by God’s grace!

Paul is declaring that it is possible to be enslaved to God apart from the written Covenant of the Jews, an idea that would be quite foreign and scandalous to a Jew who is steeped in typical Judaism. And he is implying that this enslavement comes about by means of the inward work of God when He pours out His Spirit in a person’s heart.

See also Romans 2:6-10, “**2:6** [God] will pay back each man according to his deeds—**2:7** on the one hand, eternal life to those who, in accordance with their perseverance in doing good, seek after glory and honor and immortality, **2:8** but, on the other hand, anger and fury to those who, out of selfish ambition, disobey the truth and obey unrighteousness. **2:9** God will pay back tribulation and anguish to everyone who pursues evil, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, **2:10** but glory and honor and shalom to everyone who pursues what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

¹⁵⁷ χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ ὅτι ἦτε δούλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὑπεκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδασκαλίας –

Based perhaps on what Paul has heard about the Christians in Rome and on what he knows must be the case if God really has worked in their hearts and changed them by His grace, he is grateful that they now are not only committed to the NT message of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, but also are no longer existentially enslaved to sin and evil to the extent that they are fundamentally unwilling to obey God.

In fact, they are fundamentally desirous of obeying God (in the midst of their sinfulness). In other words, it is a person’s inward response (“from the heart”) to “the content of the teaching” of the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah, not the content of the written Covenant *per se*, that now becomes the indicating factor in his life as to whether or not he is appropriately obeying God. While it is important for Jews to recognize the *national* relevance of the Mosaic Covenant within the present realm, it is more

important for both Jews and Gentiles to recognize the *eternal* relevance of the NT and the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah. In fact, a proper or “biblical” response of obedience to the latter message can come from only a genuine change inwardly by God that also results in a person’s no longer being dominated by his inherent evil and committed to it, which, in turn, means that he can and will pursue goodness as the logical and spiritual outcome of this change.

¹⁵⁸ ἐλευθερωθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ – Paul is telling his Roman Christian readers that, when God changes a person inwardly so that he has authentic, biblical belief, the person is no longer trapped in and enslaved to the necessity to violate God’s moral commandments as his fundamental spiritual condition. Instead, he is now trapped in the necessity to pursue morality *in the midst of his sinfulness*—as will become clearer at the end of chapter 7. This obviously does not mean that he can act morally perfectly, but that at least his desire is to pursue complete obedience to God. This is the existential transition that takes place for those inwardly changed by God—from a desire to ignore, reject, and disobey God to a desire to embrace, learn about, and obey Him (from the desire basically to be an atheist (someone who is unwilling to know the one, true God of the Bible) to the desire to be a biblical theist).

The changed person is “freed from sin” inwardly in his fundamental desires to be “enslaved to righteousness” inwardly in his fundamental desires.

¹⁵⁹ Ἀνθρώπινον λέγω διὰ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν. ὥσπερ γὰρ παρεστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν, οὕτως νῦν παραστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ εἰς ἀγιασμόν – Paul acknowledges that raw evil continues to be a part of the moral and spiritual structure of even a divinely and inwardly changed human being—as he will state more explicitly at the end of chapter 7. Therefore, he goes on to speak in terms of his readers’ actual experience as inwardly changed human beings. He states explicitly that their whole purpose and pursuit in life was evil before God changed them. Now, however, they have been transitioned inwardly as a result of the Holy Spirit’s circumcising their hearts, so that, in line with this divine change, Paul exhorts them to commit themselves now to pursuing goodness in order to be different from what they were before. They were trapped in the sinfulness of their “flesh,” which is what they were born with as sinful human beings and could not escape by themselves, even with the Mosaic Covenant and all the human effort they put into obeying it. Now, they are trapped in their fundamental desire for righteousness for the purpose of being set apart from all the rest of humanity whom God has not inwardly changed, even though their moral weakness still rears its ugly head and makes itself known through their sinning on occasion as Christians.

In other words, when a person is trapped in and enslaved to sinfulness, his purpose in life is to disobey God and pursue evil. When he becomes trapped in and enslaved to authentic belief, his new purpose is to be different from his former life and pursue righteousness, goodness, and authentic obedience to God—and all this in spite of his ignorance of or lack of focus on the Mosaic Covenant.

Only those whom God has changed inwardly can do what Paul is exhorting these Roman Christians to do.

¹⁶⁰ ὅτε γὰρ δοῦλοι ἦτε τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ἐλεύθεροι ἦτε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ – Paul is saying that, by definition, a completely sinful human being cannot properly obey God with genuine, biblical inwardness. This latter quality requires a miracle of God and His grace to bring it about. Thus, Paul says in a rather tongue in cheek manner that his Gentile Christian readers were “free” from pursuing genuine righteousness and morality while they were still enslaved completely to their sinful and immoral condition before God changed their inwardness.

They were “free” in the sense that they could not, in and of themselves, change their minds to obey God from a circumcised heart, because they were enslaved to their sinfulness and innate rebellion against God.

“Slaves of sin” = trapped in a mindset that obeyed the flesh and its natural hostility towards God

“Free with respect to righteousness” = unable to be fundamentally committed to obeying God’s moral commandments as a person whom God has set apart from the rest of humanity who are hostile to Him, even if they live rather morally good lives

¹⁶¹ τίνα οὖν καρπὸν εἶχετε τότε; ἐφ’ οἷς νῦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε, τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἐκείνων θάνατος – In answering the question as to whether or not it makes sense to pursue evil when only God’s grace is at play in a person’s existence and not the Mosaic Covenant, Paul asks his Gentile Christian readers in Rome what the long-term “benefit” of their being trapped in sin and hostile to God had been—especially in the light of the fact that the outcome of such a life is “death” (θάνατος) = eternal condemnation and destruction from God. Indeed, the things which they used to do now make them feel ashamed (ἐπαισχύνεσθε).

In other words, there was no good eternal benefit (or temporary benefit, which is not being ashamed), even if there appeared to be temporary benefit on earth of satisfying their insatiable desires that were evil. The inference from this line of questioning is that pursuing sin, even though the Mosaic Covenant is not occupying the major role in a Christian’s life, makes no sense in the light of the eternal effects of abject evil, which are God’s wrath, condemnation, and permanent destruction of the person.

Again, see Romans 2:6-16.

¹⁶² νυνὶ δὲ ἐλευθερωθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας δουλωθέντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἀγιασμόν, τὸ δὲ τέλος ζωῆν αἰώνιον – Now that the Gentile Christians in Rome have undergone the miraculous inward change by God’s Spirit of becoming authentic believers, the present, existential benefit in the temporary realm is that they are “freed from sin,” “enslaved to God, and “set apart,” i.e., different in their pursuit of morality from human beings who are only sinful with no inward change.

In addition, the eternal benefit for these Christians is “life” forever and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God. This is the

“end” to which they can look forward as those “set apart” by God in their inner being.

¹⁶³ τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας θάνατος, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν – Paul expresses the very simple principle that there are two possible outcomes to existence in the present realm for sinful human beings. A person either earns the “wages” of the justice and condemnation of God that results in eternal “death” and destruction, or he is granted eternal “life” through God’s grace (χάρισμα) and the advocacy at the final judgment of Jesus, who rules them now in the sense that they are obeying his instructions.

Again, the inference is that it is only logical that a person commit himself to making the kind of choices that head in the direction of the kind of life that he will lead in eternity, regardless of whether or not the Mosaic Covenant is a part of his thinking in the midst of God’s gracious and merciful working in his life now of facing him into the depth of his sin and the magnificence of Jesus’ death by which he will be saved from God’s wrath—all through God’s grace!

¹⁶⁴ Ἡ ἀγνοεῖτε, ἀδελφοί, γινώσκουσιν γὰρ νόμον λαλῶ, ὅτι ὁ νόμος κυριεύει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐφ’ ὅσον χρόνον ζῆ – Paul is now going to make a play on words with “life” and “death.” Clearly, the Mosaic Covenant is relevant for only a *living* Jew, even if it is not as relevant as Jesus the Messiah. This is to say that the Covenant is definitely a Jewish Covenant to which the Jews are historically and morally obligated to pay attention, even if they are believers in Jesus as the Messiah. Thus, Paul can say that, if a Jewish husband dies, his Jewish wife is no longer is obligated to keep the Covenant by remaining married to him. (Parenthetically, it would be interesting to know if there have been or are Jews now who believe both in eternal life and that it will be necessary to continue to follow the Mosaic Covenant even after they die.)

Paul also assumes that he is speaking to Christians who are familiar with the Mosaic Covenant. Does this mean that his Gentile Christian readers have been exposed to the Torah and its Covenants, even though the Jews have been absent from Rome for eight years, or that, once they are confronted by returning Jews with the supposed need to follow the Mosaic Covenant, they will definitely become familiar with it? Probably more the latter, so that they can refer to his letter on an ongoing basis and learn better what he is communicating to them in it.

¹⁶⁵ ἢ γὰρ ὑπανδρὸς γυνὴ τῷ ζῶντι ἀνδρὶ δέδεται νόμῳ· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ, κατήργηται ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ἀνδρός – The example here is, if a Jewish husband dies, then his living widow is no longer obligated to be married to him. (I wonder how the Mormons interpret this passage?) The inference that Paul is making is that if a Jew dies, he is no longer obligated to the Covenant either, and Paul is going to exploit the concept of going through a death-like process when any person becomes a Christian.

¹⁶⁶ ἄρα οὖν ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνδρός μοιχαλὶς χρηματίζει ἐὰν γένηται ἀνδρὶ ἑτέρῳ· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρᾳ ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, τοῦ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὴν μοιχαλίδα γενομένην ἀνδρὶ ἑτέρῳ – This principle of living Jews’ being obligated to follow the Mosaic Covenant means that a wife who gives herself to another man besides her husband commits adultery. However, if her husband dies, then she is no longer married to him and is free to marry another man. She is released from the moral commandment within the Covenant that requires that she remain married to her husband. Again, the inference is that moral commandments pertain to “living” people, not to “dead” people.

¹⁶⁷ ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ἑτέρῳ, τῷ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγεθέντι, ἵνα καρποφορήσωμεν τῷ θεῷ – Like the situation of a husband who died, leaving his wife free to marry another man, the Gentile Christians in Rome have “died” by means of their increased awareness of their sinfulness through proper instruction by the Mosaic Covenant which teaches them not only how humanly insoluble is the problem of their sin, but also that obedience to the Covenant by itself will not make them good enough to please God so as to receive His eternal blessings. The Covenant is powerless and they are powerless to make them obey it properly.

Their “death” is a death to sin in the sense that they have looked at the crucifixion of the Messiah as God’s primary “message” of how rebellious towards Him they are with its eternal consequence of death and destruction. As a result of “hearing” God’s message of the cross, these Gentile Christians have renounced any complete attraction to rebelling against God and trying to escape from it through their own human and inwardly immoral efforts (see Romans 6:2ff.). Their old husband, the flesh with its innate sinfulness, has died. Instead, they have “married,” i.e., attached themselves to Jesus as the Messiah, in order that they may pursue morality in light of the fact that they will receive eternal mercy at the judgment through God’s grace and through the Jesus’ advocacy.

Thus, their dying by the Covenant to their human and ongoing sinfulness and marrying the Messiah occurred as a result of their identifying themselves with the Messiah’s role of suffering death, when he so graphically and publicly displayed his attitude of repudiating sinfulness and then was raised from the dead by God as proof of his qualifying to be the eternal king and priest for people who believe in him.

Galatians 2:19 “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. **20** “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. **21** “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

¹⁶⁸ ὅτε γὰρ ἦμεν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τὰ διὰ τοῦ νόμου ἐνηργεῖτο ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν, εἰς τὸ καρποφορήσαι τῷ θανάτῳ – This is a statement of the previous “husband” who is now dead—the moral and spiritual condition of a sinful human being before he transitions to being a changed of heart believer in the Messiah.

Paul is saying that the Mosaic Covenant alone, without the active work of God’s grace within a human being, is powerless to save anyone from God’s condemnation—because of the power of sin within him. Consequently, any human being, including Paul

and his fellow Jews, who so assiduously follows the Mosaic Covenant by thinking that it should be the focus of his relationship with God will find himself incurring only God's wrath, eternal condemnation, and the death which is destruction, not His mercy (see Romans 2:17ff.). This is because the person is ultimately relying on his sinful self, even if he mistakenly and in a self-deceiving manner has convinced himself that he is good enough to make himself worthy of God's granting him approval and eternal life.

The inference from this, too, is that the person basically has no choice but to rely on his sinfulness, because he has not been changed inwardly and made to face into his slavish moral condition and renounce it. He is still a slave of sin.

In addition, Paul is not saying that the Covenant "arouses" or causes the sinful passions within a human being to rise up and be stronger. He is saying that the Covenant is there in conjunction with sin within him, so that it is powerless to help him. All it can do is point out his sin and, if God were to be so gracious, reveal these passions to sinner himself so that he could go on to repent in an authentic manner and become an authentic believer in Jesus as the Messiah.

¹⁶⁹ νυνὶ δὲ κατηργήθημεν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἀποθανόντες ἐν ᾧ κατειχόμεθα. ὥστε δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος καὶ οὐ παλαιότητι γράμματος – Just as a woman is "released" from the Covenant and its commandment for a husband and wife to remain faithful to one another, so also authentic Christians are "released" from the Covenant and its commandments to remain faithful to their sinfulness, "that by which we were being held fast," which is all the Covenant can do because of its inability to change a sinner's inwardness.

This brings about THE fundamental change for a biblically and inwardly changed person in that he commits himself to recognize his sinfulness and to denying that, because of it, he in any way can be self-pleasing to God, even now that he has become miraculously changed by God through the inward work of His Holy Spirit.

Their sinfulness had unavoidably also tied Paul and the Jews to eternal condemnation, which was by virtue of their being "tied" to their sin, they were also tied to the condemnation explicit in the Mosaic Covenant and its commandments. But now that Paul and others, on the basis of Jesus' death, have properly and inwardly renounced any claim to eternal life from God that they think could result from their own efforts of obeying the Mosaic Covenant, they find themselves released from the call to condemnation that the Covenant makes towards them.

They also find themselves existentially slaves of the Spirit of God, not slaves of the words of the Covenant. They have given up the Covenant and themselves, i.e., their self-efforts, as their means to eternal mercy for the benefit of possessing God Himself working within them inwardly as their means to mercy. Consequently, the Covenant by itself is no longer what even a believing Jew is counting on to solve the problem of his need for God's mercy. Instead, the true believer has gone through a kind of death that releases him from his sin and its effect of eternal condemnation and trying to use his sinfulness the same way that a husband who dies releases his wife from trying to use him as her husband. This concept of salvation apart from the Covenant is what Paul also explained in Romans 3:21ff., "However, now, independently of the Covenant, the justification of God has been manifested, to which the Law and the Prophets bear witness..."

In other words, this death for a believer, releases him from trying to use the Covenant in the midst of his sinfulness to gain God's favor and forgiveness. He no longer slavishly pursues obedience to the Covenant with only the "letter," the written words, of the Covenant to help him in the midst of his sinfulness and natural human performance. Instead, the Spirit of God, who has inwardly changed him and continues to operate within him, makes him a slave of God with the motivation to pursue obedience to God with authentic belief.

The Covenant by itself is just marks on paper (or stones, or papyrus), so that a person is left to himself and his natural human performance. But as such, he cannot use the words of the Covenant to please God. Only the Spirit of God's inward work can cause a person to be pleasing, and the clue as mentioned in this letter for Paul as to whether or not someone has been inwardly changed is their commitment to the message that Jesus is the Messiah, even though this message also is just words.

By saying "we," Paul is indicating that all these comments pertain not only to the Christian Gentiles in Rome, who by definition are not morally obligated to the Jewish Mosaic Covenant, but also to Jews who are morally obligated to the historical relevance of the Covenant.

¹⁷⁰ Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὁ νόμος ἁμαρτία; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔγνων εἰ μὴ διὰ νόμον· τὴν τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν οὐκ ᾔδειν εἰ μὴ ὁ νόμος ἔλεγεν· οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις – All this negative talk about the Mosaic Covenant with respect to obtaining God's mercy and pursuing morality leads Paul to realize that it would be easy to get the impression that he thinks that the Covenant simply is a bad thing that God gave the Israelites. And this would be true especially for anyone who thinks he can be good enough on his own to please God and earn His blessing of eternal life. So if the problem in his relationship with God is not within him, then it has to be outside him and in the Covenant. Indeed, the Covenant is actually evil. Right?

On the one hand, Paul has said that the Covenant is not the solution to sinfulness and people's need for God's eternal mercy. On the other hand, he has also said that it is not the best tool to motivate people toward morality. Therefore, Paul asks another obvious question—is he is saying, therefore, that the Mosaic Covenant is a bad thing? Absolutely not. He will go on to argue that the Mosaic Covenant itself is good. He has already said in 5:20-21 that it plays a very important role in a person's life by exposing his sinfulness to him. He will repeat this in more detail that this is the case especially if a person looks at its commandment that addresses the inward desires of a human being, such as the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet (long for with an evil desire) your neighbor's house..." (see what Paul said in Romans 5:20, "And the Covenant came in with the express purpose that sin [the awareness of sin] increase").

Exodus 5:17, "You shall not covet (לֹא תִחְמַד לְבֵית רֵעִי) (οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις) your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's

wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Thus, the word *ἐπιθυμήσεις* means to desire in an immoral and rebellious way that which someone either cannot have (because God simply will not provide it) or should not (because God has said that it is immoral to do so), and the corresponding noun *ἐπιθυμία* means simply an immoral and rebellious desire similarly, regardless of how strong it is. Thus, “lusts” is not really the best English translation of the plural noun *ἐπιθυμίας* (see Romans 6:12), because these desires can be for anything or anyone, even apart from sexual immorality. Everyone feels a desire for things and people. The problem is when these feelings are based upon a fundamental desire to rebel against God that comes from a person’s inherent sinfulness and sinfulness. We crave what we cannot have (as James talks about in his letter, i.e., wealth, when God has placed a person in a position of being less wealthy than the wealthy) and what we should not have (the fulfillment of immoral desires).

Paul begins the answer to this question by stating that he did not come to a good, biblical understanding of the evil within him until he looked carefully at one specific verse in the Covenant that forbids people from even desiring things rebelliously. He will go on to say that what he discovered is that he uncontrollably desires things rebelliously, which means that he cannot personally avoid being evil at some level of his existence and avoid being condemned by God.

¹⁷¹ ἀφορμὴν δὲ λαβοῦσα ἡ ἀμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς κατειργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν· χωρὶς γὰρ νόμου ἀμαρτία νεκρά – In Exodus 20:17 was the one commandment of the Mosaic Covenant that was saying to Paul that he should not have a rebellious element to even his inner desires for things and people. It is one thing not to perform an outward, immoral action according to the literal wording of the other commandments of the Covenant, e.g., “You shall not murder.” However, it is a whole another thing not to have an immoral desire according to the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not desire something rebelliously.”

Consequently, the Tenth Commandment of the Mosaic Covenant was requiring that Paul’s desires never cross the line from pure goodness to immorality as driven by his innate and inherent sinfulness, i.e., that he never become a slave of sin, which he already was. In other words, the Tenth Commandment was calling for him basically to be morally perfect, not only in his actions, but also in his inner life and desires, which was an impossible requirement with which to comply. Only Jesus had a morally perfect inner and outer life. Consequently, Paul’s sin and inherent sinfulness basically laughed at the commandment and caused him to have this exact element of rebellion in conjunction with his desires. There was no stopping his sinfulness from influencing his internal desires for people and things. So his desires became evil, because it was simply a part of who Paul was. In fact, rebellion was the fundamental moral condition within him, especially before he acquired a changed inwardness by means of a divine miracle. Therefore, before Paul acquired eyes to see what he was really like inside, the profundity of his sinfulness was not obvious to him. It lay dormant in a sense and was deceiving him into thinking that he was good, so that he was not as consciously and willingly aware of it as he needed to be in order to grasp fully the biblical message, even the concepts put forth by the Mosaic Covenant itself. It was as though his abject immoral condition was lying dead and dormant within him (or hiding behind his own self-created self-deception), while he blithely went on his way, thinking that he was being a good Jew who was properly obeying and pleasing God through the Mosaic Covenant.

¹⁷² ἐγὼ δὲ ἔζων χωρὶς νόμου ποτέ, ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἡ ἀμαρτία ἀνέζησεν – Before Paul saw clearly just how sinful he was, he honestly thought that he was doing so well in following the Mosaic Covenant that he had acquired (even earned?) God’s favor, blessing, and forgiveness. He genuinely thought that God was duly impressed with his obedience and that he was actually a good person. However, when God started to perform and continued to perform His miracle on Paul of changing his heart, the high and impossible calling of the Tenth Commandment for any sinful human being finally hit home to him, and he realized that in the midst of his human obedience was actually rebellion against God so that he deserved His condemnation and not His mercy. And not only did Paul realize how sinful he was, but also his immoral condition took on a new existence that revealed itself to Paul in such a way that it absolutely overwhelmed him and was proved to be completely out of his control—that only God’s grace was going to save him from His condemnation and from himself.

¹⁷³ ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπέθανον καὶ εὐρέθη μοι ἡ ἐντολὴ ἢ εἰς ζωὴν, αὕτη εἰς θάνατον – When Paul, through the lenses of his changed heart, saw clearly just how sinful he was in the face of the Tenth Commandment, he felt himself die before God, i.e., he felt himself being deserving of God’s eternal condemnation, not being worthy of His blessing of forgiveness and eternal life. In addition, he formerly had believed that the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant was to provide him with a sense of life and blessing on earth by virtue of his obedience and with eternal life later by his acquiring it (earning it?) through his obedience. But now he was realizing that the purpose of the Covenant was to enhance his realization of the eternal death that he deserved from God and could not escape simply through obeying it with the innate resources of his sinful and evil condition, i.e., through his natural human performance, because he was facing squarely into the requirements of the Covenant, which were too great for him to fulfill.

Again, this is what Paul means in 5:20-21, **5:20** And the Covenant came in with the express purpose that sin increase. However, where sin increased, grace was present even more abundantly, **5:21** so that, just as sin ruled the day by means of death, thus also grace would rule through justification for the purpose of eternal life through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.

¹⁷⁴ ἡ γὰρ ἀμαρτία ἀφορμὴν λαβοῦσα διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἐξηπάτησέν με καὶ δι’ αὐτῆς ἀπέκτεινεν – By definition, human sinfulness and inherent sinfulness produces a self-deceiving element within the human psyche. It is in rebellion against God, who requires that the person admit to himself that he is in rebellion against Him. But, if the person desires to continue to rebel against

God, then he has to deceive himself into thinking that he is not in rebellion against God and, therefore, is a good person. “I am a good person; at least, I am not like Hitler!” In other words, self-deception in regard to a person’s sin and sinfulness is all part of the strategy of sinfulness.

Thus, a person’s inherent rebellion against God includes a strong element of self-deception, in order to prevent the person from coming to grips with his rebellion and ceasing to be rebellious. Abject and complete rebellion, which is the case for naturally born human beings (except Jesus of Nazareth), does not want to cease to be rebellious. Obviously, the result of sinfulness’s self-deception is to place the person in a position of eventually incurring God’s justice and eternal death/condemnation at the final judgment, which will, nevertheless, not come as a surprise. This is in accord with what Paul stated in Romans 1, that every sinful human being knows deep down inside that he is accountable to God and condemned by God in his present immoral condition.

¹⁷⁵ ὥστε ὁ μὲν νόμος ἅγιος καὶ ἡ ἐντολὴ ἀγία καὶ δικαία καὶ ἀγαθὴ – Paul’s conclusion from this discussion is that the Mosaic Covenant is certainly not bad. Indeed, by virtue of the fact that it is calling for no hint of a rebellious element in a person’s inner desires, it is good. In addition, because the Covenant also reveals a person’s sin and sinfulness when the Tenth Commandment finally hits home to him in the midst of God’s miraculous inward work, it is doubly good for any human being. This is because, like Paul, everyone needs God’s eternal mercy and forgiveness and discovers just how much he is dependent solely on God’s grace for it—because his sin is out of his control at the most basic level of his being, in his natural, innate humanity.

¹⁷⁶ Τὸ οὖν ἀγαθὸν ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο θάνατος; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ ἡ ἁμαρτία, ἵνα φανῇ ἁμαρτία, διὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μοι κατεργαζομένη θάνατον, ἵνα γένηται καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ἁμαρτωλὸς ἡ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς – Our natural tendency as self-deceiving sinners is to attempt to blame something or someone other than others for why God would be displeased with us and condemn us to eternal death.

By claiming that his sin and sinfulness came to light through the Covenant and its Tenth Commandment in the midst of God’s miraculously changing him, it would be easy to think that Paul is saying that the Covenant actually *caused* his sinfulness to come alive, indeed, even *caused* him to rebel against God and incur God’s eternal condemnation and destruction. It is the Covenant’s fault, not his. Right?

Thus, Paul asks another simple question, is this what he is saying? And his answer is, absolutely not. It certainly is one thing for Paul to be sinful at the innate level within him, and it is quite something too for him to be sinful in the face of the *good* commandment of the *good* Mosaic Covenant. Here was the Covenant calling for good, inner moral obedience to God, even supposedly leading to obedience based upon a changed and circumcised heart that exhibits authentic belief (see Deuteronomy 10:16ff.), and, yet, all Paul saw was his own internal evil leading to eternal death and destruction in the midst of the commandment.

Consequently, his sinfulness felt even more depraved and evil in the light of the fact that a good, moral commandment was powerless to help him obey it. The sinfulness was there, right within him, and there was nothing he could do about it to get rid of it. Indeed, not even God was going to get rid of it for him this side of eternity.

And, as he will go on to say, this was even in the midst of a new fundamental desire to pursue morality instead of rebellion against God—a desire caused by the Spirit of God when He transitioned him from an unbeliever to a believer, from a person of unchanged heart to a person of changed heart.

¹⁷⁷ Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστιν, ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν – If Paul had the right stuff that corresponded exactly to the Covenant, which calls for authentic, inner moral obedience of belief to God, then Paul could obey it without God’s help and gain His blessing of eternal life. However, the situation is quite different. The Covenant is “spiritual,” meaning that it is true even though it is powerless to help him by virtue of its being simply words on a page that Paul could learn in his mind. But Paul is made of fleshly natural-born rebellion against God. Consequently, there is no sufficient match nor dynamic between Paul and the Covenant for him to be able to obey it properly, even though he can learn it intellectually.

In other words, when Paul says that the Covenant is “spiritual,” he means that it is not anything tangible or available as an actual power source to make him obey it. He cannot tap into it and draw power and strength from it in order to do what it requires, which is to be a changed heart sinner who obeys it properly. As Paul implied in 7:6, the Covenant is “letter,” and what he needs is the “Spirit” of God.

Thus, Paul has come to realize that he is simply a sinful and sinful human being at his most innate level. He is trapped in his sinfulness, unless God performs a miracle inside of him. And even though God does perform this miracle inside him of changing his heart—which God did for Paul, he nevertheless continues to be plagued by his immoral, inner condition—in his “flesh.” It does not go away but remains there. What changes are his inner desires to obey God with humility and dependence on His grace, rather than thinking that he by himself is capable of obeying God in a pleasing manner.

The bottom line is, even though the Mosaic Covenant is both good by virtue of its being unadulterated truth that calls a sinful human being to changed-heart morality, any human being (other than Jesus) who reads and learns the Covenant and then tries to follow it is evil, because all he has available to himself is his natural human strength and performance, which is itself trapped in sin. Therefore, there is a radical moral discrepancy between the Covenant *per se* as God’s communiqué to mankind and mankind. Paul was not willing to embrace this difference (even though he “knew” it according to how he describes all human beings in Romans 1, i.e., that they all “know” it) as long as he was not inwardly changed by God and His grace. He had deceived himself into thinking that he was good according to the Covenant and worthy (in some sense, even if he would not say aloud that he was

earning it) of obtaining God's ultimate blessing of eternal mercy and life!

¹⁷⁸ ὁ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω· οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω, ἀλλ' ὁ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ – Now Paul describes the confusing process of discovering his sinfulness in the light of his originally thinking that he was a good person and capable of sufficiently obeying God to combat any level of sin within him. As God's miracle began to work on him so that his insight into his sinfulness increased, Paul wanted to obey God properly by having even pure moral desires. He really recognized the importance and value of morality, indeed, even moral perfection, wanting to be and do only that which is moral according to the Tenth Commandment without any hint of evil. However, he found his desires constantly and inextricably either fully rebellious as his innate sinfulness took over his desires or his desires existed in the presence of his continued rebellion against God at the innate level, the very thing he also wanted to avoid. He despised his sinfulness and desperately wanted to avoid it—but he could not! In other words, his innate sinfulness kept rearing its ugly head, despite his fundamental desire for goodness which he was in the process of acquiring and maintaining through God's Spirit and transcendent work within him. Paul had already mentioned this phenomenon with respect to Gentiles on whose hearts the Covenant's moral demands have been written with the result that their thoughts alternately accuse or even defend them (see Romans 2:14ff.), because they are authentic believers apart from being exposed to the explicit scriptures and instruction of God.

¹⁷⁹ εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ, σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός – Thus, Paul, even more than when he was blind to the depth of his sinfulness, agreed with the Mosaic Covenant that it was calling him to do good, to obey God, and to avoid evil—including craving what either he could not have or he should not have. However, now his understanding of the Covenant was even greater, because he had been pushed by God within himself to grasp the full significance of the Tenth Commandment. Prior to the inner change that God had created, he had agreed with the Covenant that it was good. But now his agreement was at a whole another level that made his understanding of it truly correct. He saw the the Covenant came in so that his sin would increase—by his becoming so aware of it that he realized that he did not have the innate strength to get rid of it.

¹⁸⁰ νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἀμαρτία – Yet, Paul also realized that there was a reality that resided within him that was causing him to go in a moral and spiritual direction that he did not want to go—toward disobeying God. Thus, he became a kind of dichotomous person. On the one hand, he now had a fundamental and basic desire to perform authentic goodness that is not in the presence of sinfulness and moral rebellion (because of his more profound understanding of the Tenth Commandment). On the other hand, he was also still plagued at a deep level by his being trapped in an innate disobedience of God.

Therefore, I put quotation marks around the “I” in this verse to represent the part of Paul that truly wanted to do good in the face of his innate sinfulness. Prior to the effect of the commandment, he simply was not willing to grasp just how evil he was. After the commandment (and the work of the Spirit of God within him), he was. Thus, this “I” is a part of him that genuinely wants to do good, while he also says that his sinfulness unavoidable leads him to disobey God. The upshot of what Paul is describing here is that a person who is transitioning to being a Christian, or one who has already made the transition to being a Christian, i.e., an authentic believer in God and Jesus as the Messiah, does not get rid of his innate sinfulness and sinfulness even though God has miraculously changed him inwardly. It can be said that his fundamental desire as a human being has been changed. He is truly a different person, and his moral life will change to a degree also, but he will not be able to be as good a person as he desires. His basic desire now as a human being is goodness, morality, and to be rescued from God's eternal condemnation through Jesus and His mercy. However, completely out of his control, his sinfulness still exists within him and, on a practical level, rears its ugly head on occasion, and perhaps more often than not, so that he ends up doing evil instead of good—even to a degree “against his wish” so to speak and definitely at an inner level. Therefore, he displays a fundamental desire for morality and appeals to God for His mercy, which he will receive at the final judgment, but he also displays his sinfulness, so that authentic anguish over his immorality, repentance and contrition in the light of it, and true effort to put at bay the effects of his ongoing sin also become a part of his experience (see Romans 8:23,24). Consequently, Paul feels caught between his newly acquired fundamental desire that persists throughout the rest of his life by God's powerfully causing it to do so (see 1 Peter 1:5) and his ongoing sinfulness with which he was born.

¹⁸¹ Οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ μου, ἀγαθόν· τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ – The result of this process for Paul was that he had to conclude that he cannot be a good person in and of himself. Indeed, he cannot really obey the Mosaic Covenant and be a morally good person as a Christian. Regardless of how much he would desire to do what is right in every moment of his life, it is simply not going to happen this side of eternity. Therefore, any goodness he does is always in the midst his inherent sinfulness, and his inherent sinfulness makes itself clear and obvious on occasion.

As much as he had originally convinced himself that he was a good person, the best that he could do, before God had changed his heart, in his even “desiring” and “wanting” to obey God through the Mosaic Covenant was to do good outwardly and do evil both inwardly and outwardly—while deceiving himself into thinking that he was doing enough good to satisfy God, even earn God's favor. In addition, the best that he can do now, after God has changed his heart, in his “desiring” and “wanting” to do good and obey God (while seeing only a limited amount of success – see Romans 8) is also to do goodness as he desires sometimes but then do evil when his sinfulness overwhelms his whole being in the midst of his desire to do good.

While this is maddening on the one hand to a genuine believer, it is also what motivates him both to repentance and to obedience as he looks forward to an eternal life of moral perfection in the Kingdom of God.

¹⁸² οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ὁ οὐ θέλω κακὸν τοῦτο πράσσω – Paul cannot stop himself from doing evil. He thought that he was in control enough of his moral condition and actions through his innate moral condition that he could truly do what is good. But this was only to deceive himself into thinking this, and he ended up being and doing nothing but evil even when he felt the sense of wanting to do good. His sin just overwhelmed him on occasion. Indeed, whether it be abject evil, that any human being can recognize, or masked evil, e.g., performing the Mosaic Covenant in a religious, Jewish community without authentic belief, his actions are still definitely evil at times that alert him to how out of control his sinfulness is. Yet, now he does not fundamentally desire to do evil as a spiritual effect of God’s having performed a miraculous change within his inwardness that the Mosaic Covenant also calls, for example, acquiring a “circumcised heart.”

¹⁸³ εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω ἐγὼ τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία – Here again as in v. 17 Paul explicitly mentions the kind of dichotomy that he sees within himself. One part of him wants to do good. But another part of him causes him to sin.

He speaks of his inherent sinfulness as though it is a separate person within him who is completely out of his control, but he also recognizes that being sinful is no longer what he truly wants to be. It is not “he.” In other words, his fundamental desire is what actually defines him. It did before God changed him inwardly when his desire was to hide from the depth of his sin, even in his religious and moral obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. But his fundamental desire now defines him as a person who ultimately wants to be good but who acknowledges wholeheartedly his sin that prevents him from obeying God sometimes even when he wants to.

Therefore, because his basic inclination is no longer to rebel against God, whatever element that resides within him that remains in rebellion against God, i.e., his sinfulness, is not who he really is. It is not what actually defines him biblically, spiritually, and eternally. His immorality is thus this other person within him. He observes himself desiring to follow the Tenth Commandment in the Mosaic Covenant as it actually commands him to do so, without any hint of rebellion against God, and yet something within him will not permit him to do so. Paul calls this something “the sin which indwells me.” And one of the troublesome aspects of his inward, immoral condition is that, regardless of how strong is his feeling toward authentic obedience to God, he cannot hold his immoral condition at bay.

Thus, Paul’s sinfulness is actually out of his control and appears in an explicit manner without asking his permission. It just happens itself onto him, and there is nothing that he can do to stop it. The result is that Paul cannot make himself do good whenever he wants to do so. Regardless of how much he desires to do good, Paul must do evil at times, whether it is obvious evil (like murder) or religious evil (like attending synagogue (or church for Christians) without authentic belief).

He does evil, first, all the time within this element of sinfulness that resides within him, and, second, whenever sinfulness “decides” to overwhelm him and follow its existential and practical bidding in his outward and inward choices of behavior, which could even be simply craving things or envying others in violation of the Tenth Commandment.

¹⁸⁴ εὐρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον, τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, ὅτι ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται – As a result of the process of God’s inwardly changing him, Paul has now discovered the level of sinfulness that is inherently within him. He is utterly rebellious against God and cannot stop himself from sometimes doing what is evil, especially at the level of his desires where they are unrighteous. The commandment requires that he not crave things he cannot or should not have. But he does. Fortunately, though, his fundamental desire as a human being has changed from ignoring his unrighteous actions and desires so as not to repent of them genuinely. And this has been true even while he was performing the Mosaic Covenant and thought he was obeying God in an appropriate way.

Now, he wants to obey God as a result of His inner miraculous work of grace, which leads him also to face into the sin within him that is out of his control. Thus, both his new basic desire and his sinfulness that “is present within” him will be a part of Paul’s experience from here on out until the end of his life. And he will have to take them both into account constantly as long as he lives. But this is a good thing. This is authentic Christianity—living the ambivalent life!

¹⁸⁵ συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον – Particularly as a Jew who has grown up learning and pursuing obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, Paul has no problem agreeing with the goodness of its commandments, especially now that he has been changed inwardly by God and can appreciate more profoundly the life of morality and worship to which God has called the Jews through the Covenant. And this would include the Tenth Commandment as he has explained here in Chapter 7, which also reveals the depth of his own sinfulness as a result of the inner work of the Spirit of God.

¹⁸⁶ βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς μου καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου – Now that Paul has identified the inherent sinfulness within him at the level of his natural-born humanity and that exists alongside his new fundamental desire to obey God in a legitimate way, he also realizes that he is trapped into sometimes having to obey sin. He cannot escape it completely. Indeed, he wants to do what is moral and good according to the Mosaic Covenant. However, there is another reality, his sinfulness, that does not allow him to free himself completely from it.

He seems to identify a third reality, which I translate as “another set of instructions in my members.” But I think that this is the

same as “the instructions of sin that are in my members.” In other words, sin “is warring against the Covenant in [Paul’s] mind,” and sin is “making [him] a prisoner of” it. This is how powerful sin still is in even a regenerate human being. It not only wars against his Spirit-given desire to do good. It makes him do evil sometimes when he knows in his mind that he prefers to do good. This is why Paul will go on in the next verse to express how miserable he is. His sin is out of his control and will require a new body in eternal life to free him completely from it.

As a result, to be a fundamentally changed human being results in neither complete nor enduring moral perfection in the present realm, because his innate evil is always there within him. Indeed, it results in his obeying the “instructions of sin” even when he has a desire to do good. The best that a person can hope for in this life is to do good as a result of genuine belief while the goodness is inextricably alongside the evil of his sinfulness. Thus, his goodness is from his genuine belief while his fleshly natural-born humanity is still sinful. Consequently, the NT message is not about rescuing people from all their evil in the present life but in the next and eternal life. In the meantime, Christians live with the biblical “hope” of entering into the eternal Kingdom of God and being transformed into morally perfect beings, while they remain “in their flesh” with “members” as innately evil as unbelievers.

Romans 8:23-30, “8:23 And not only this, but we also, because we have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, while we wait confidently for our adoption, being released from our body. 8:24 We were saved on the basis of hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who waits expectantly for what he sees? 8:25 However, if we hope for what we do not see, we are waiting confidently for it with patient endurance. 8:26 And likewise, the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what is necessary to pray, but the Spirit Himself pleads for us in the manner of our wordless groanings. 8:27 And He who carefully examines the hearts knows what are the mental intentions that come from the Spirit—that He pleads on behalf of those who are holy in accordance to God. 8:28 Thus, we know for those who love God that everything works together for their good, for those who have been called according to His plan, 8:29 because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren. 8:30 And those whom He predestined, these He also calls, and those whom He calls, these He also justifies, and those whom He justifies, these He also glorifies.”

As the bumper sticker says, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.”

¹⁸⁷ Ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἀνθρώπος· τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου – In the midst of truly discovering the purpose of the biblical message in regard to eternal life, Paul finds himself absolutely “wretched” and miserable in his present condition with the fact that his continued sinfulness in his “flesh,” “members,” and “body” constantly stares him in the face. The existential reality of his dichotomous situation, being in the process of acquiring a changed heart with the fundamental desire to be authentic morally perfect and his fleshly sinfulness with the fundamental desire to disobey God, leaves him feeling utterly miserable about his inability (because of) to rescue himself from God’s condemnation.

In other words, left to himself, even with the Mosaic Covenant’s help, Paul realizes that he is a lost cause and an eternally condemned human being before God. And being stuck in his sinfulness with nothing in and of himself to escape incurring God’s justice and eternal death leaves Paul emotionally and psychologically miserable. This is probably especially when he has spent his whole life up to this point counting on sufficiently impressing God with his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant that comes from his innate humanity (i.e., deceiving himself into thinking that God has created all human beings with the innate capability to please Him; otherwise, why make them at all?)—so as to earn God’s mercy and the outcome of participating in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. Yet, where Paul finds himself is exactly where all human beings should eventually recognize their moral and spiritual condition in order to understand properly their inner and unstoppable sinfulness that can result only in God’s justice that they deserve if God does not miraculously grant them mercy and forgiveness apart from anything they do.

Thus, Paul asks a rather rhetorical question which is intended to have a sobering effect on his Gentile readers, who may be confronted with pressure from Jews’ returning to Rome to follow the Mosaic Covenant as the central focus of their relationship with God. Paul wants his readers to feel their own sinful misery in conjunction with his feeling his and then realize that only Jesus the Messiah and God’s grace by means of the work of the Spirit of God, *not* the Mosaic Covenant and its powerless letters on stone or papyrus in conjunction with their innate, sinful humanity, can rescue them from God’s condemnation, i.e., “from this deadly body,” a body that is leading them and all sinners towards God’s eternal death and destruction.

¹⁸⁸ χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. Ἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μὲν νοῦ δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας – Certainly, Paul cannot thank himself for escaping God’s condemnation. The only person whom he can thank is God, because of what God has done through His grace by changing him inwardly and by Jesus’ death that has qualified him to be Paul’s intercessor at the final judgment. God will rescue Paul from not only his sinful body, but also eternal destruction when Jesus returns and raises the believing dead and lifts off the earth the believing living to transform them into immortal and morally perfect beings.

In the meantime, “as a result,” Paul will have to put up with a condition whereby he agrees with everything the OT (and by extrapolation the teaching of Jesus) instructs him, the whole Torah of God so to speak. We remember that this includes the Tenth Commandment of the Mosaic Covenant in calling him not to have any evil desires and envy within him. However, Paul’s condition before Jesus returns is such that he is still afflicted by the sinfulness of his flesh and natural-born humanity that “instructs” him to do what is evil and sometimes leads him, without his being to resist, to disobey God and His moral commandments, which is all highly discomfiting to him—as he explained in chapter 7.

There are two Torahs or sets of instructions in us authentic Christians who have studied our Bibles. One is that of God that

includes the moral commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, so that we genuinely want to obey God. The other is that of sin that tugs at us and wants to lead us to disobey God. Sometimes we do what is good and right. Sometimes we sin, and in the present realm we are certainly not in control of which of these two wins out at any moment—mainly because of God’s sovereign plan for each one of us. Nevertheless, we are called by God to strive and pursue doing what is good all the time.

Yet, and for the moment, without taking into account the inner work of the Spirit of God and in the midst of these two sets of instructions within Paul, he cries out, “Wretched man that I am.” But fortunately God has solved this problem to a degree in the present realm, and, certainly, eternal life will not involve this dichotomy for any person who had authentic belief during his lifetime in the present realm. In the Kingdom of God, we who live before Jesus’ return will always and forever be morally perfect. There will be no struggle with sin.

¹⁸⁹ Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ – The bottom line of all this discussion about the Mosaic Covenant is that it does not provide a person with an escape from God’s eternal justice and condemnation through either outward good, religious, and moral obedience or the Levitical, sacrificial system. Instead, it is this other “method” that Paul has been describing and that he personally experienced through the inner work of the Spirit of God that faced him into not only his own ongoing and out of control sinfulness but also the significance of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah who suffered death on his behalf.

In line with this, Paul will go on to explain that it is those who associate themselves with Jesus through their belief in him, his role, and his perspective on reality who will not face God’s eternal justice and condemnation. Instead, they will encounter God’s eternal mercy. Indeed, Paul has been arguing this all along.

For example, Romans 3:24, “so that they are justified as a gift by means of His grace in the light of the redemption that is in the Messiah Jesus.”

Also, Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by belief, we have a peaceful relationship with God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah.”

¹⁹⁰ ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἠλευθέρωσέν σε ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἀμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου – Paul has mentioned the Spirit of God three times so far in this letter—

1) The first was in Romans 2:29 to the effect that biblical circumcision that leads to proper obedience of God is performed on the heart by God through the inner work of His Holy Spirit. Thus, inward circumcision is what God intended all along to be what He required. Yet, only He could perform it according to His sovereign will and predestination of those whom He has chosen to acquire his necessary condition for His mercy and eternal life.

2) Then, in Romans 5:5 Paul states that God has poured out His love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, therefore also referring to the circumcision of the human heart by God that leads a sinful human to recognize the significance of God’s love through Jesus’ death—that he deserves God’s condemnation and eternal death and he receives God’s complete forgiveness through Jesus’ advocacy at the judgment. The inner work of the Holy Spirit causes a sinful human being to recognize the vital work of Jesus who died on the cross in the midst of the sinner also recognizing the depth of his sin.

3) Thirdly, in Romans 7:6, Paul says that Christians serve God in a completely new way—as a result of the inner work of the Holy Spirit, rather than through the sole and external object of the written commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, where the only resource available is their own natural-born humanity and its constant sinfulness.

Now, with a fourth mention in Romans 8:2, Paul is saying basically the same thing as all three of the previous passages. The fact that the Spirit of God works by leading sinners to confront and acknowledge the whole reality of their sinfulness which they cannot eliminate and having a new, genuine desire to obey God and pursuing obedience as much as possible by His grace. This means that their existences will result in eternal life instead of in eternal death and condemnation. In other words, there is the fact that, by his priestly intercession, Jesus will rescue Christians from God’s condemnation at the final judgment. There is also the fact of God’s grace and miraculous work inside human beings during the course of their lives in the present realm.

Addressing specifically his Gentile Christian readers in Rome, Paul is assuming the reality of God’s having changed their inwardness. They no longer have only a fundamental desire to be unwilling to submit themselves to God. Instead, they now have a genuine and fundamental desire to obey Him and gain His mercy in the midst of their sinfulness that continues this side of eternity.

While Paul had said in 7:23 that he was a prisoner of his sin even as God was working within him to reveal his true moral (sinful!) condition to him, he can also say that, in a sense, he is not a prisoner of sin. He had been trapped by his “flesh” with its innate sinfulness on a road toward incurring God’s anger and condemnation. However, now, even in the midst of continuing to be plagued by the inherent presence of his sinfulness, he is genuinely associated with the Messiah Jesus and the ramifications that Paul has been explaining in this letter. Therefore, he is no longer on the road to the awful result of eternal condemnation and death. Instead, God has truly freed him from that outcome—and this through both the inward work of the Spirit of God whereby his heart has been changed and the future mediating work of the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus the Messiah.

Paul is still enslaved to sin in his “body”/“flesh” and free from its eternal consequences of God’s condemnation by his “heart.”

I think, therefore, that Paul is changing slightly the meaning of νόμος in this verse. It does not refer to a instruction or set of instructions, such as the Mosaic Covenant or Jesus’ teaching. It refers to the principle of life by which a human being exists, which is either that only of sin and his unwillingness to seek, learn from, and obey God authentically, or that of the Spirit of God and being willing to be a genuine person of truth, belief, and love towards God and others.

¹⁹¹ Τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἠσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός, ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί – There are two problems with the written Mosaic Covenant—

1) With our natural-born sinfulness as the only resource for obeying it, people fail to be obeyed properly, i.e., with changed hearts, in order to be rescued from God’s justice.

2) In addition, a new and different priest besides the Levitical priests is required to intercede on behalf of human beings.

Here, Paul is focusing on the first problem as he has been doing since chapter 7. Man is inherently evil and incapable in and of himself of obeying the Mosaic Covenant in a manner that is pleasing to God that requires a changed heart. Instead, God uses His Spirit to provide miraculously the necessary inward resource that brings about authentic, biblical belief that even the Covenant requires.

See [Deuteronomy 10:16](#) “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.”

This is the important and necessary mechanism of changing a sinful human being that the Mosaic alone cannot accomplish, because, in its “weakness” (it cannot reach inside a sinner and change his heart), it appeals to only a person’s natural-born sinfulness.

Also, now a sinner’s belief is in Jesus as the crucified Messiah and not in the Mosaic Covenant, because Jesus with his personal propitiatory offering and future intercession at the final judgment is the only proper basis for obtaining God’s eternal mercy (see Romans 3:25).

Then Paul begins explaining the solution to the second problem, that of an adequate and qualified priest to mediate on behalf of sinners at the final judgment. Jesus fulfills this role as an authentic human being, albeit morally perfect and only “in the likeness of a sinful human being.” Without going into a lengthy explanation of how Jesus’ death works to qualify him to be our mediator at the judgment (see Hebrews), Paul nevertheless states that he did experience the sentence of death from God that any normal sinner deserves and would experience. As a result, Jesus becomes the appropriate and only legitimate priest to intervene at the final judgment for evil sinners with genuine belief, i.e., for Christians and any authentic OT believers.

Theoretically, God could have assigned Jesus the job of mediating without requiring that he die in order to do so. And then He would have granted mercy simply on the basis of Jesus’ intervention, not on the basis of both his death and his intervention.

However, His overall purpose was for the Messiah to suffer, to demonstrate the judicial effects of man’s sinfulness, and thereby through suffering to earn his position and responsibility of being our advocate at the judgment.

[Alternative interpretation – through Jesus’ death and propitiatory offering God condemned sin eventually to be destroyed rather than condemning the sinner to be destroyed.]

¹⁹² ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα – I suggest that Paul’s meaning of “the just requirement of the Covenant” and its being “fulfilled in/for us” can be stated this way—

The Mosaic Covenant requires that sinners die for their sin if they do not obey the Covenant properly, which is only by having a changed heart and becoming genuinely repentant before God. By means of his own death on the cross, Jesus demonstrated the fulfillment of this requirement, which becomes effective for those whose hearts God changes by His Spirit and who appropriately understand their condemned condition and face into their sin while believing that Jesus will rescue them from the same kind of death, which will be eternal.

Another way to state this is, the Mosaic Covenant requires that sinners find a way to become forgiven by God in order to escape His condemnation and death, and it also requires that this way be through the circumcision of the heart (see Deuteronomy 10:16 and Deuteronomy 29-30) and implies that the sacrifices of animals are inadequate to be the basis for God’s eternal mercy.

Consequently, while the Mosaic Covenant on its own cannot rescue people from God’s condemnation because the only material it has to work with is human sin, nevertheless God provides the way both through Jesus’ death, so that he qualifies as their high priest, and through the Spirit’s inward work in sinners to cause them to believe in Jesus’ role as intercessor and advocate at the final judgment. Thus, Paul states that the fulfillment of the requirement of the Covenant of both a changed heart and death are both made possible through the combination of the Spirit’s inward work and Jesus’ death.

The inference, therefore, is that the purpose of both Jesus’ death and the Holy Spirit’s inward work was for God to show, first, what is the result for human beings when as sinners they disobey the Mosaic Covenant and, second, that people need a divinely caused inner change in order to take advantage of Jesus’ death and advocacy at the final judgment. It is always these two linchpins of soteriological theology that the NT authors put forth for themselves and their readers as Paul says here—for those “who do not live according to [their] natural-born sinfulness but according to the Spirit.”

Paul will now go on to explain this latter truth. If our morally perfect mediator suffered death as a demonstration of the extreme judicial consequences of our sinfulness, then, obviously, our sinfulness is a huge issue that can be dealt with by only God—both through His work within us of changing our spiritual orientation and through Jesus’ advocacy at the judgment on the basis of his death on the cross.

See also [Romans 2:13](#) For it is not the hearers of the Covenant who are justified before God, but it is the doers of the Covenant who will be justified.”

Paul is describing here in 8:4 “the doers of the Covenant who will be justified,” because they “guard the requirements of the Covenant (τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου)” as Paul describes in [Romans 2:26](#) Therefore, if the uncircumcised man guards the requirements of the Covenant, will not his uncircumcision be considered as circumcision.

See other uses of δικαίωμα and δικαιώματα in the NT that also mean “requirement” and “requirements” respectively.

¹⁹³ οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος – Here Paul further explains what the requirement of the Covenant is—being inwardly inclined towards the things of God and morality with repentance by the Spirit of God (literally “according to the Spirit”). And that this requires the Spirit of God to bring this about. Therefore, if the Spirit of God has not worked in the heart and mind of a sinful human being, then he is, by definition, inclined spiritually and morally away from God and sets his mind on things that are not biblically oriented towards God and His eternal purposes of rescuing sinners from His condemnation (literally “according to the flesh”). On the other hand, those in whom the Spirit of God is working as a result of God’s predestination (see later in Romans 8), are definitely and unfailingly inclined spiritually and morally towards God, so that they think and regard as important God and what He has communicated in the Bible and through Jesus regarding His eternal salvation and how to live life in the present realm in a way that is pleasing to Him.

The Greek word φρονέω can mean to think or to regard something. In this context, Paul is using the word to describe the overall issue of the two kinds of inwardness that are possible for human beings. One kind of inwardness is where they are compelled to “think” about the things of their natural-born sinfulness because they are completely enslaved to it. Thus, they are inextricably *inclined* toward sin, to follow and obey it wherever it may lead them. The other kind of inwardness is where people are compelled by the miraculous work of God to “think” about the things toward which God has now pointed them—authentic obedience that is based upon genuine belief, along with an honest regard for their immoral condition and need for God’s eternal mercy. Thus, these people are inextricably *inclined* toward pursuing obedience to God and appealing to Him for mercy in the midst of their ongoing sinfulness as described in chapter 7. Therefore, Paul is explaining further that people without God’s inward work of the Holy Spirit are fundamentally dependent solely on their natural-born humanity alone for everything they do, including obeying God (but in a religious and not a biblical manner), while those who have God’s inward work are different and fundamentally dependent on Him alone for how they live their lives. They pursue God, His truth, and how to live as He instructs them, and they do so with a commitment that only changed of heart sinners can do.

¹⁹⁴ τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη – To explain even further, Paul says that the inward orientation of a sinful human being who lacks the inward work of God’s Spirit (literally “the inclination of the flesh”) will only incur eternal condemnation and death, while the inward work of the Spirit of God (literally “the inclination of the Spirit”) causes a person to receive eternal life (ζωή) and the accompanying quality of eternal existence of moral, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual wholeness (εἰρήνη).

Thus, the non-believer’s intellectual, psychological, and spiritual intentions exhibit a quality of eternal death even now before they receive it, while the believer’s intellectual, psychological, and spiritual intentions exhibit a quality of eternal life even now before they receive it. In other words, there is something about a person’s thoughts, words, attitudes, choices, and actions that reveal their eternal destiny, whichever it may be. A person either does not care about biblical matters, or he does—and not just traditional doctrines that keep getting repeated without really thinking through the documents of the Bible.

¹⁹⁵ διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται – Another apt way to describe the intentions of the unchanged sinful human being (literally “the inclination of the flesh”) is that he is personally, intellectually, and morally antagonistic and hostile toward God (ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν), and he displays his rejection of God by his refusal to listen to and follow God’s instructions as laid out for humanity in the biblical documents (τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται). He does not accept in a committed manner the authority of God and the Bible in his life. He just is not that interested in the Bible, even if he may claim to study it and follow it—like the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus’ and Paul’s day. Indeed, Paul says that this kind of person is completely incapable of following God’s instructions and obeying him (οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται), implying that people like the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus’ and Paul’s day were like this, while they appeared to be all about listening to God’s Torah and following it. Thus, the reason that a strictly sinful inward orientation results in eternal condemnation and death is because this orientation makes the person an object, hostile enemy of God. This person chooses to remain unwilling to seek and to obey God, so that he will not and cannot submit to God’s teaching, including the Mosaic Covenant and its call to being a divinely and inwardly changed person, regardless of how much he thinks that he is obeying the it (again, like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day, and like the religious people of Christendom during the last two thousand years).

What a radical statement for Paul to make if he has religious Jews specifically in mind (as he probably does). But, of course, he was one and, therefore, knows exactly of what he speaks. As much as he thought that he was fully committed to submitting to God and His teaching through the Torah of the OT and the Mosaic Covenant, now he knows that he was hostile toward God and acting as His enemy—because of his unchanged heart. The clear and obvious evidence for this was his seeking to put followers of Jesus both in prison and to death. A person cannot get too much more hostile toward God than executing followers of His Anointed One and Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁹⁶ οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσσαι οὐ δύνανται – Paul has been arguing all along that human beings are enslaved to immorality and live their lives as God’s enemies by being unwilling to seek Him, His truth, and authentic obedience to Him (see Romans 1), and it is only when God changes them inwardly can they obey Him biblically and with authentic belief. Another way of saying this is that people who are characterized by only their innate sinfulness (literally “in the flesh”) are completely incapable of pleasing God when they obey Him (θεῷ ἀρέσσαι οὐ δύνανται). They may try and try and try, and it may appear that they are being incredibly submissive and obedient to God, even spouting Bible verses and singing songs to Jesus—outwardly. However, they are actually His enemies and hostile towards Him, because they have not been inwardly changed by

God. They are still evil and without authentic belief and obedience because God has not given them the fundamental humility and desire to obey Him that comes from only the inward work of His Spirit.

¹⁹⁷ ὅμεις δὲ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ἀλλὰ ἐν πνεύματι, εἴπερ πνεῦμα θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν. εἰ δέ τις πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ – Paul goes on to assure his Gentile, Roman Christian readers that they are not characterized strictly by their sin (literally “in the flesh”), as long as “the Spirit of God dwells in” them, i.e., is working within them. If the Holy Spirit has changed their inwardness and continues motivating them toward facing into their sinfulness and evil “flesh,” while also moving them to appeal to God for mercy through the Messiah as their advocate (literally they are “in the Spirit”), then they “have the spirit of the Messiah” and they are “of” God and belong to God. Those in whom the Spirit of God does not dwell and who do not have the same kind of spiritual and moral mentality as Jesus do not belong to God—no matter how much they may claim to be biblical and Christians.

Here, “spirit of the Messiah” refers not to the Holy Spirit but to the kind of inwardness that Jesus himself had as a created human being and the Messiah. Jesus clearly understood and acknowledged adequately the sinfulness of human beings in the midst of his own moral perfection and as the icon of God. He likewise repudiated sin and evil to the extent that proud and arrogant human beings felt it necessary to rid themselves of him by crucifying him rather than face into their own inherent evil. And he repudiated sin to the extent of being willing to die on the cross as instructed by God in order to qualify to be the one who intercedes on behalf of sinners.

Paul is saying that those who associate correctly with the Messiah are those who have the same *kind* of inwardness that he had. Obviously, they cannot have the same *degree* of inwardness and be morally perfect this side of eternity, but at least they can genuinely love God, love morality, and hate evil and their own sin—albeit while continuing to have the presence of their innate sinfulness within them as Paul describes in Romans 7.

In Romans 7, Paul admitted that sin “dwells” in him, while now as a Christian, the Holy Spirit “dwells” in him. Yet, he is a wretched man because of the continued presence of sin in his “flesh,” while he longs for the day when sin will disappear from his existential reality and he will be morally perfect like Jesus.

¹⁹⁸ εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, τὸ μὲν σῶμα νεκρὸν διὰ ἁμαρτίαν τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωὴ διὰ δικαιοσύνην – Paul repeats an idea that he has been emphasizing, that if the same kind of inwardness that Jesus the Messiah had resides within a human being, then this person is characterized by a spiritual and moral dichotomy. On the one hand, moral evil is still so much a part of him through the presence of his “flesh” and innate sinfulness that he deserves God’s eternal condemnation and death. On the other hand, his fundamental, spiritual orientation is toward goodness and morality by means of the inner work of the Spirit of God, so that, being in a state of justification, he will receive God’s complete forgiveness and eternal life.

His “body” of sinfulness is leading him towards the death of eternal destruction while his spirit of changed inwardness, justification from God, and a new fundamental desire to obey God is leading him towards eternal life and mercy.

Fortunately, the latter is going to win in this competition!! This is as Paul says at the end of Romans 7 and the beginning of chapter 8. There is now no condemnation “for those who are in the Messiah Jesus.”

¹⁹⁹ εἰ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἐγείραντος τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ νεκρῶν οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὁ ἐγείρας Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ζῶποιήσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν διὰ τοῦ ἐνοικοῦντος αὐτοῦ πνεύματος ἐν ὑμῖν – Another way of describing the present and future state of a true Christian is that now, in the present realm, the Spirit of God, i.e., the activity of God within the created reality that grabbed hold of Jesus’ body so to speak and raised him from the dead, “dwells” in a Christian, grabbing hold of him and moving him toward solidified belief in, knowledge of, and understanding of truth.

In addition, this same faithful and guaranteed activity of God, according to His promises and the purposes of the story that He is writing within the creation, will also make the “body” of a Christian alive in the eternal Kingdom of God (ζῶποιήσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν) in the same way that He made Jesus’ body alive after his death.

The bodies of sinners in the present realm are subject to and deserving of death in contrast to the future realm, where they will be indestructible—theologically speaking. God will simply not allow anything or anyone to introduce an element into the eternal Kingdom of God that will be sinful and will result in decay, death, and destruction for human beings.

Thus, Paul is simply saying that just as God raised Jesus from the dead for the sake of eternal life, God will raise Spirit-indwelling people from the dead for the sake of their eternal life.

²⁰⁰ Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ὀφείλεται ἐσμέν οὐ τῇ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν – After describing the clear dichotomy of a Christian along with God’s faithfulness to complete the process that He began when He first inwardly changed a sinful human being into an authentic “believer,” Paul’s conclusion is that authentic Christians have no moral obligation to pursue an earthly existence of evil, even though their innate, immoral condition naturally still exists and even though it leads them towards sin and evil. The inference of course, as Paul says, is that they have a moral obligation (ὀφείλεται) toward genuine morality and belief in the truth of God that includes especially Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. This is supernaturally where God through His Spirit is leading them.

Thus, Paul drives home the point that he started at the end of chapter 5, that neither a Jew nor a Gentile needs the Mosaic Covenant in order to be motivated to obey God. All that is required, indeed a better motivator, is both God’s inward change that moves a person to face into his innate evil and appeal to God for mercy and the Spirit’s instruction to obey God’s moral commandments. This is so that he may enter into the eternal Kingdom of God on the basis of God’s grace and not on the basis of

his own innate moral performance. In other words, it is grasping the profundity and significance of both God's grace and Jesus as the crucified Messiah that is more than enough motivation not to continue to do evil but, instead, to pursue goodness and obedience to God. Paul has said as much in Romans 6 also.

Our natural ability to please God results only in His condemnation, while our supernatural ability by the Spirit of God results in His justification and glorification of the sinner.

²⁰¹ εἰ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ζήτε, μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν· εἰ δὲ πνεύματι τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε, ζήσεσθε – Here we have another repetition of these fundamental ideas. If a person operates in this present realm as a human being according to his innate sinfulness (literally “according to the flesh”), then the necessary and legal result of his existence will be God's condemnation and eternal death (ἀποθνήσκειν). But if a person “by the Spirit,” repudiates the natural sinful inclinations and acts that originate in his body (literally “puts to death the actions of the body”), i.e., as a result of his continued sinfulness, then he will gain eternal life via God's mercy (ζήσεσθε).

Thus, it is not that eternal life cannot be spoken of with reference to a person's efforts and actions, as though the only way to speak of it is in terms of God's grace and mercy. No, a person can be said to “get himself” eternal life (ζήσεσθε) by following the leading of the Spirit of God within him so that he pursues truth, goodness, morality, and genuine repentance in the midst of his continued sinfulness. Of course, this person does not in any way *deserve* eternal life. It is simply that his fundamental desire, his choices, and his actions theologically align themselves with God and His purposes within him through the work of His Spirit. In other words, this person has the “spirit of the Messiah” (8:9), the same kind of perspective on reality that Jesus had, and he acts in such a way that he reaches out, spiritually speaking, to take hold of eternal life now through the inner work of the Spirit and later through Jesus' advocacy at the final judgment.

²⁰² ὅσοι γὰρ πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται, οὗτοι υἱοὶ θεοῦ εἰσιν – Thus, Paul declares that people who are being motivated and moved by God's inward work of His Spirit (literally “being led by the Spirit of God”) can also be said to be “sons of God” and therefore people who can call God Father as the very source of their human existence and biblical belief and obedience. In other words, the children of God and, therefore, the sons of God are those Jews and Gentiles who are spiritually inclined toward God by virtue of His miraculous work by His Spirit within their hearts, not those who are attempting to follow the Torah and Mosaic Covenant in and of themselves (by the natural-born sinful humanity), which, as Paul has been arguing, leaves them in a position of being God's enemies and due to receive His condemnation and eternal death, not His “children” and “due” (but not by deserving) to receive His forgiveness and eternal life.

²⁰³ οὐ γὰρ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα δουλείας πάλιν εἰς φόβον ἀλλὰ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υἰοθεσίας ἐν ᾧ κράζομεν· ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ – In the previous verse, Paul mentioned that those in whom the Spirit of God is actively working to cause them to believe and obey God are the true “sons of God,” in contrast to the thinking of erroneous Judaism that this title belongs to only those who are religiously following the Mosaic Covenant. Here, he says that Christians are no longer “slaves,” meaning that their status is one much greater than unbelievers who, by definition, remain afraid of God and His eternal condemnation. Now he goes on to describe the relational benefits of God's miraculous inward change within a human being. He makes an interesting statement that seems to contradict what he said in 6:17-7:6 where he talked about Christians' being enslaved to morality and God. He says here in 8:15 that Christians are not enslaved, but he means enslaved to sin in such a way that the person is despairingly fearful of God's eternal condemnation (see 1 John 4:8 and Soren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*). The former “spirit of slavery” was the inward spiritual characteristics of a human being who is enslaved to sin and doomed to receive God's condemnation and destruction. In contrast, the Christian's “slavery” to God so to speak can also be described in terms of the inward spiritual characteristics of a “spirit of adoption” by God as His child. Thus, the genuine believer can call God “Father” and appeal to Him with loving and endearing terms, because this is how God views him—no longer as an enemy but as His son or daughter. If God is not one's “Father,” then He is only a person's judge who will condemn and destroy him. Therefore, this is no small point that a sinner who is marked by the inward work of the Spirit of God can call God “Father” and cry to Him for assistance in persevering in faith during this lifetime.

In addition, nothing within the present realm—no circumstance or even choice or action on the part of the Christian—changes the familial characteristics of God's relationship with the Christian (see Romans 8:28-39). Another way to say this is that to be inwardly changed by God is to receive from God something completely different from a person's natural-born inwardness that can be identified by unavoidable obedience to sin and that also results in rightly being afraid of God's justice and condemnation, even if a person does not admit that he is afraid and pursues disobedience with what is basically reckless abandon as a sinner (see Romans 1). Instead, the inwardly changed person knows that he has been adopted by God as his Father to be His son or daughter, which then leads him/her to address God as “Father” in a loving and intimate way and without the fear of condemnation. There is certainly a sober concern in the Christian not to be cavalier about God's grace that is a kind of “fear,” i.e., a deep, deep respect and reverence for God's justice and character, but there is not the abject despair that is inevitable for unchanged, sinful human beings.

²⁰⁴ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ – In this way, the Spirit of God acts in conjunction with Christians' inwardness to reveal the fact that they are authentic believers. First, by addressing God as “Father” and the source of their existence and inward change that results in eternal salvation (8:15) and second, by sympathizing with Jesus in regard to the present, sinful realm and their own sin while longing for eternal life (8:17,18), Christians demonstrate that they are

in fact God's children.

Thus, the "children of God" are not defined by being physical descendants of Abraham who diligently follow the Mosaic Covenant by their own strength and find their motivation to obey God strictly in the Torah and Mosaic Covenant, but by being inwardly changed by God through the work of His Spirit and finding their motivation to obey God on the basis of His faithful and promissory work within them through His Spirit and His work for their benefit through the death and advocacy of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

As a result, both Jews and Gentiles who are authentic believers are considered to be God's children. This has been Paul's argument all along.

See Galatians 3:26, "For you are all sons of God through belief in the Messiah Jesus."

While it is true that the Jews are the children of God as an ethnic group, it is only the Jews among the Jews who are inwardly changed by the Spirit of God who are eternal children of God like their Gentile counterparts.

²⁰⁵ εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ, εἶπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν – It is natural to speak of an "inheritance" when one is also talking about "children" and their "Father." Even in the ANE, children inherited their parents' property at their death. In this case, the parent, i.e., God, does not die and cease to exist within the realm where the children inherit His property. Instead, God continues to live and, yet, provides His "children" who are authentic believers with access to His eternal property for which they will have a level of responsibility within it along with the most important "child of God" and "son of God," the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, the only way that sinful "children of God" can acquire the same eternal property of God that the Messiah does, the eternal Kingdom of God, is if they are willing to feel the same way about escaping this realm and entering into the eternal realm as Jesus did because they experience to some level the "suffering" and same negative responses of people who are hostile to God and the truth. Jesus certainly felt the way he did about the present realm because he experienced the pain and suffering of persecution even to the point of death on the cross. And he felt with those who suffered from their sin, disease, loss, and any other causes of suffering in the present realm. Therefore, our sympathizing with Jesus also involves our feeling the pain of our own human, sinful existence as followers of Jesus in the same manner and with the same kind of experiences of persecution from unbelievers that he had. Nevertheless, his goal was his glory in the eternal Kingdom of God, and our goal is our glory with him in the kingdom. Jesus understood the sinfulness of man because he suffered death on their behalf. And he longed to finish this responsibility and acquire the glory of the Kingdom of God. We long to be rid of our sinfulness and acquire the same glory with him.

See also Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the leader and finisher of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Thus, the upshot of being a true child of God through the inward work of the Spirit is to be an heir of God's wonderful and fabulous property, which is first the restored Kingdom of Israel on this earth and then the new earth of the new creation of the eternal Kingdom of God, along with becoming morally perfect like God and His Messiah Jesus. This means also that a person inherits this kingdom as Jesus the Messiah does. However, there is a condition for obtaining this kingdom as a future possession. The person must be willing to experience the same kind of visceral reaction to sin and a deep longing for the Kingdom of God. This is what Jesus experienced because of man's sin. In his case the suffering came in the midst of people's rejection of truth, such as his crucifixion at the hands of the scribes and Pharisees of his day. They were committed to their longstanding, erroneous Jewish traditions rather than being genuinely interested in the OT and what it actually is expressing. But the suffering of a sinful Christian is that of his own sin and hating it (see 8:23), along with the negative effects of other people's sin in his life. If a person is truly desirous of being freed from his sin and the sins of others in the eternal Kingdom of God, then he will gain an existence there of moral perfection and life which will be more wonderful than he can ever imagine.

Nevertheless, it is also true that, if the sinful Christian is willing to be rejected by the world and the religious communities that include the institutions of Christianity, i.e., Christendom, that are characterized by their traditions and not by the biblical truth, then he will also find himself in the future in an unbelievably impressive situation of being morally perfect and inheriting the eternal Kingdom of God just as Jesus does.

²⁰⁶ Λογίζομαι γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς – In order to bolster his argument that there is a bright future for the Gentile Roman Christians and himself, Paul comments that he has figured out that all the hardships of his own and other's sin that he has endured as a human being and a Christian in the present realm, "the sympathetic sufferings of the present time," are nothing in comparison to the wonderful experience of moral perfection and eternal life that God will show and bring about in their lives at a future date, "the future glory that will be revealed to us," i.e., when Jesus returns.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul calls his earthly sufferings "momentary, insignificant trouble" [momentary, light affliction] that "is producing for us an eternal, weighty awesomeness [weight of glory far] beyond all measure and proportion." His view of his moral failings and the effects of both his and others is that their pain is so much less in comparison to how wonderfully enjoyable the moral perfection and eternal existence of the Kingdom of God is going to be. Therefore, no amount of suffering or pain for a Christian, as one who is still sinful and even rejected by the world and religious communities as Jesus was, can hold a candle to the incomparable and enjoyable personal sense of well-being that he will experience in eternal life.

²⁰⁷ ἢ γὰρ ἀποκαρδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἰῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται – Now, Paul pulls into the conversation the actual creation that is its own entity separate from human beings, and he personifies it. He declares that the creation, like

authentic human believers, is eagerly looking forward (*ἀπεκδέχεται*) to the time when God will end the present realm and create the new one that will be characterized by life and not death, by moral perfection and not sin, and by the true and eternal “children of God,” who will become obvious to everyone. Indeed, the personal, subjective, continuous waiting with eagerness for what God will finally bring about in regard to His promises to Abraham is fundamental to both the rest of the creation and sinful human beings who are authentic believers in God’s promises.

Why does Paul personify the creation? Probably to emphasize the fact that there is nothing in the present realm, including the Torah with its Mosaic Covenant, that is ultimately relevant to or is worth focusing on for the true believer as if it can produce the level of fulfillment and satisfaction that only God can by transforming sinful human beings into morally perfect and eternal human beings. As a result, there is nothing in the present realm that can fully satisfy a human being, because this creation is “subject to futility” and “decay” and “groaning” as Paul says in 8:20-22.

In other words, the next and future realm, which will contain the eternal Kingdom of God, is the only realm worth counting on for what every heart longs for, complete safety, security, peace, and joy, because everything will be perfect and permanent and will neither decay nor die. We human beings in the future realm will find ourselves completely fulfilled and satisfied with our existences at every moment. Indeed, it is as though the present creation longs to change completely and be different from the way it is, especially to be rid of human beings who are unwilling to obey God and to treat all other people lovingly and kindly. Even the creation longs to be inhabited by only morally perfect human beings. Certainly, the animals who are sacrificed according to the instructions of the Mosaic Covenant would find it more to their liking if such a violent death was not a part of their experience. In addition, Jesus’ death was only because the present realm includes death as part of its nature. Thus all the decay, deterioration, and death of the present realm, especially for human beings, will disappear, so that the creation is eager and anxious to rid itself of these things.

Therefore, accepting and embracing as unavoidable the deteriorating condition of the present realm and not thinking that it is possible to make heaven on earth is part of a mature and biblical outlook on life. Those who think the Bible is calling us (and not Jesus) to bring about the Kingdom of God are missing the point. And even the millennial kingdom of Jesus, who will rule over the entire earth, will still contain sin. But fortunately it will not contain Satan (see Revelation 20).

Romans 8:23 And not only this, but we also, because we have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, while we eagerly await (*ἀπεκδεχόμενοι*) our adoption, being released from our body.

Romans 8:25 However, if we hope for what we do not see, we are eagerly awaiting it (*ἀπεκδεχόμεθα*) with patient endurance.

Hebrews 9:27 Indeed, inasmuch as it is unavoidable for men to die once, and after this—judgment, **9:28** thus also, the Messiah, having been offered once (*ἅπαξ*) in order to bear the sins of many, will be seen a second time, apart from sins, by those who eagerly await (*ἀπεκδεχομένους*) him for salvation.

All the uses of *ἀπεκδέχομαι* – eagerly await

Romans 8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

1 Peter 3:20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

²⁰⁸ τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἑκούσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι – God could have caused only human beings to be subject to decay and death in the midst of and as a result of Adam’s and Eve’s sinfulness. Instead, He has caused the entire natural realm to share in the same death-like and deterioration-like characteristics of sinful human beings. He “forced” it “to be subject to futility.” And this was “not voluntarily,” as though the creation had any say in the matter. God simply created the current realm with all its 200 or so billion galaxies with the characteristic of deterioration and death. Even stars die. But this was “on the basis of hope,” so that personification speaking, the creation waits eagerly for that which God has promised, an environment free from decay and death.

Consequently, the natural realm can itself eagerly look forward with God and His adopted children to the new creation where these characteristics will no longer exist. In other words, the creation will go through the same kind of transformation as authentically believing human beings in that it will no longer contain the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics and accompanying issues of deterioration, decay, death, and even natural events that wreak havoc and death among human beings. Therefore, the creation experiences so to speak the same level of desire on the basis of God’s guaranteed promise to rescue the sons of God from their slavery to death, so that it can be said to “hope” i.e., wait confidently, for eternal life and the eternal creation of the “new heaven and the new earth” (see Revelation 21) in the same way that people do. This is to say that the entire physical realm will be changed by God to suit His purposes for an eternal realm of moral perfection and eternal life.

²⁰⁹ ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ – The transition according to the eternal plans of God is from “slavery to decay” to “freedom of glory.” It is from things and people falling apart and dying so that they no longer exist as they did to things and people who are now free to be as glorious and awesome as God will make them where they never fall apart and they never die.

Just as human beings must of necessity obey their sinfulness and live in disobedience to God, even from time to time when He changes them inwardly by His Spirit, the creation has been enslaved to decay, deterioration, death and the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics. However, when God transforms the creation along with human beings as a result of the final judgment and

Jesus' advocacy for them, it will experience the same kind of wonderful and marvelous characteristics of life, moral order, and natural order where there are no catastrophes and death causing events such as diseases, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, etc. Danger will not exist for the creation or for human beings. Instead, the creation will be free from its forced slavery to decay and be allowed to exist in glorious perfection that matches that of the moral perfection of God's saved sinners.

See [Revelation 21:1](#) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea [=community of sinful Gentiles/peoples].

²¹⁰ οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πάντα ἢ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνοδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν – Paul says that it is a logical conclusion of looking at the creation in the light of the biblical message that every tornado, every hurricane, every earthquake, every disease, etc. points to the fact that the creation looks at these events and simply “groans” with repentant sinful human beings (συστενάζει), longing to be free from these detrimental elements of the God's current design for the created reality. These groans of the creation Paul likens to a woman in childbirth who is anticipating the pain's going away once the baby is born (συνοδίνει), i.e., once God transforms the creation and makes it “perfect” like the moral perfection of the human beings who will inhabit it with Jesus as their king in the eternal Kingdom of God.

And the creation groans in this way with the adopted children of God who themselves long to be free of their decay, impending death, and the danger that accompanies their being and living among sinners in order to experience immortality, moral perfection, and the safety and security of God's Kingdom of God. In this way, even the creation looks beyond the relevant realm of the Torah and Mosaic Covenant, i.e., the present realm, to the relevant realm of the Messiah, both the temporary restored Kingdom of Israel and then ultimately the eternal Kingdom of God afterwards (see Revelation 20,21).

²¹¹ οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν – A key and necessary characteristic of an authentic Christian and inwardly changed human being is continued sadness and disappointment because of his sin, which, on an emotional level, results in persistent, gut-level groaning (“groan within ourselves” – ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν). Indeed, this groaning may even cause him on occasion to doubt the authenticity of his belief. But the encouraging fact that Paul is pointing out is that this degree of groaning is a sign of authentic faith, as much as we sometimes think otherwise.

Paul calls the groaning of a sinful human whose inwardness has been changed “the first fruits of the Spirit.” Thus, this groaning, is the evidence of a person's desire to rid himself of the pain that comes from the psychological and emotional effects of moral guilt, in order to move on to an immortal and morally perfect condition in the Kingdom of God. This pain also comes from a person's observing and feeling the effects internally and externally of his immoral condition in the midst of his actions before God and his interactions with other human beings, where these effects can come from his own sinfulness, other's sinfulness, or the natural effects of this creation through disease, decay, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the groaning and on the basis of God's promises to Abraham, the authentic believer is confident that one day God will transform him into a morally perfect person and thereby release him from his inherent sinfulness, from “this deadly body” as Paul calls it in Romans 7:24. This transformation will constitute the full harvesting of the crop of change that God miraculously brings about for human beings in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Paul indicates that the Christian waits confidently for this future transformation to take place—because he has all along been assuming God's faithfulness to His promises to Abraham to rescue a group of Jews and Gentiles from His eternal condemnation. In addition, Paul calls this future transformation an “adoption” (υἰοθεσίαν) for which he “eagerly await(s)” (ἀπεκδεχόμενοι). In Romans 8:15, Paul has already stated that Christians have been adopted by God as a result of the Holy Spirit's causing an inward change within them in the present realm. Therefore, here Paul must be referring to the completion of this process of God's adopting human beings as His children, when He transforms them into immortal and morally perfect beings and they acquire the fullness of their inheritance by occupying the eternal Kingdom of God. This will mean also the release for human beings from their earthly bodies that are characterized by sin, decay, and death, so that God replaces these bodies with eternal, perfect, and indestructible ones.

Paul has already referred to this kind of experience for the true believer in Romans 5:3ff., whereby a Christian who grasps these concepts actually boasts in his difficult circumstances, including his own inherent immorality as even it tests and authenticates his belief, because he “boasts in the hope of the glory of God.”

See also [Philippians 3:20](#) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; [21](#) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

See also [1 Thessalonians 1:9](#) For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, [10](#) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

[Romans 7:24](#) Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this deadly body (ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου)?

²¹² τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς· ὁ γὰρ βλέπει τίς ἐλπίζει – Here Paul explicitly states that an authentic Christian does not set his heart on what Christianity can do for him in the present realm, but what it can do for him in the future realm. There is and should always be “hope” as that which characterizes the Christian's psychological outlook at human existence. The Christian looks to the future only (the hope that is not “seen”), not the present (the “hope that is seen”), for that which will ultimately satisfy him, so that he can accept whatever occurs in his life in the present realm.

As a result, our being “saved” (ἐσώθημεν) is “on the basis of hope” (τῆ γὰρ ἐλπίδι) and is always future for an authentically changed person, and he can see that any present circumstances that are not entirely painful are merely a bonus gift from God and similar to the future reality of the shalom of the Kingdom of God, while He still wants the person to focus his desires and hope on the future salvation at the judgment from His condemnation and on his eventual transformation into a morally perfect and immortal person.

²¹³ εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ βλέπομεν ἐλπίζομεν, δι’ ὑπομονῆς ἀπεκδεχόμεθα – Here Paul describes the present emotional and psychological condition of genuine Christians, that “we hope for what we do not see,” and “we are eagerly awaiting it with patient endurance.” Paul and his fellow Gentile Christians in Rome are therefore intended to wait patiently for God’s timing of fully rescuing them from His justice and transferring them existentially to the eternal Kingdom of God. They look at this present realm and never think that they need to “hope” for something in it in order to be fully satisfied and fulfilled in their lives. Indeed, they will never be completely satisfied and fulfilled in the present realm. Everything in this life is meaningful, but nothing is completely fulfilling and satisfying.

As a result, Christians keep longing for the invisible eternal Kingdom of God that will become theirs only at some point in the future, i.e., when they die and are raised at Jesus’ return or when they are lifted from the earth to join Jesus when he returns (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.). This longing occurs in the midst of a supernatural patience and enduring of all the various kind of hardships in the present existence, especially those of a person’s own sinfulness and groaning over it, while also having authentic belief that eventually God will change him into a morally perfect and immortal human being.

Hebrews 6:13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, **6:14** saying, “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you.” **6:15** And so, having patiently waited (μακροθυμίας), he obtained the promise.

²¹⁴ Ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα συναντιλαμβάνεται τῆ ἀσθενείᾳ ἡμῶν· τὸ γὰρ τί προσευξόμεθα καθὼς δεῖ οὐκ οἶδαμεν, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερεντυγχάνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις – There are two options for what Paul means by “our weakness” and our not knowing “what is necessary to pray”—

1) Paul is referring to the radical psychology of human pain and suffering, especially that of moral guilt and despair in the face of God’s justice, so that this state of being for a human being can be so overwhelming as to make him completely incapable of expressing himself in a manner that he thinks is helpful in his relationship with God. Indeed, as far as he is concerned, all that he can do is groan in the midst of his guilt, pain, and suffering that is ultimately caused by his sinfulness and the problematic situation of the whole creation that surrounds him. The good thing, though, is that his groans are not for nothing. In fact, they are themselves an effect of the work of God’s Spirit within him. Thus, Paul can say that God is communicating to God through a human being’s groaning over his sinfulness and living in this present realm that itself brings a lot of suffering into his life. This is to say that there is a divine element to our groaning over our evil condition and that of the creation, in that this is the Spirit’s doing and manner of communication to God of our desire for not only His mercy but also His future gift of moral perfection and eternal life, for one groans also for that which he does not have—perfect goodness within an eternal existence.

2) Paul is referring to a morally weak person, a sinner, who is without the work of the Spirit of God within him, so that he really does not know what is necessary to pray. And what is necessary is that he realize that he is a sinful and evil person who desperately needs God’s grace to rescue him from His condemnation and eternal death. Therefore, by eventually working within him, the Spirit does lead him to groan appropriately over his sin and appeal to God for His mercy as a result of Jesus’ death, which reveals what he deserves, and his resurrected life, which reveals what God will grant him instead of eternal death. I think that #1 is correct, with prayer being a natural function of human beings, especially Jews who know the OT and who practice the Mosaic Covenant, so that Paul is highlighting the main purpose of prayer, which is to repent genuinely of one’s sin and sins while also seeking God’s mercy and forgiveness, which the person knows because of Jesus’ appearance and the information about him regarding his death that displayed what he, the sinner, deserves, so that Jesus will intercede for him at the final judgment.

In other words, if all that the invisible work of God does in a sinner is to cause him to groan over his sin within him, while he longs to be different and to be set free from his sinfulness and made morally perfect by God, then this is truly how “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” and “pleads for us in the manner of our wordless groanings.” The actual wording of our prayers may not be as coherent or articulate as we would like it to be, but we will take the “wordless groanings” as a divinely caused substitute, and God will readily accept them also.

This is the only use of the word ὑπερεντυγχάνει, which clearly means the same thing as ὑπερ and εντυγχάνει, i.e., to intercede or plead before someone on behalf of someone else—either to appeal for mercy or to appeal for justice, as in Acts 25:24, Romans 8:27, 34; 11:22, and Hebrews 7:25.

²¹⁵ ὁ δὲ ἐραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας οἶδεν τί τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος, ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἁγίων – In this process of the Spirit’s leading us authentic believers to groan over our immoral condition, God is the best interpreter of what is transpiring within us by reading our groanings as those that come from people who are truly different from the rest of the unbelieving world and who are pleading for mercy and morality as their future experience. God “knows what is the intent of the Spirit,” because He is the one who “carefully examines the hearts,” and He knows that the Spirit is pleading “on behalf of those who are set apart in accordance with God.” As a result, this whole process contributes to the eventual outcome of the human existence of a sinner in whom the Holy Spirit is working—eternal life.

4) Fourth, because of their genuine, biblical belief, similar to what God did for Abraham and is explicitly described in Genesis 15:6, He considers these chosen human beings to be in such a good standing before Him that they will receive His mercy and forgiveness at the judgment. In other words, He “justifies” (ἐδικαίωσεν) them.

5) Fifth and finally, because the justified are guaranteed to receive eternal mercy, Paul can say that their transformation into morally perfect people is as good as done. God “glorifies” (ἐδόξασεν) them. In other words, no step in the process from God’s choosing, predestining, calling, and justifying sinful human beings, who will be rescued from His condemnation, will fail to result in their transformed into glorious, morally perfect human beings by His glorifying them. The likelihood of God’s completing this process is no less certain than God’s own existence itself. If God determines to do something, He will do it.

²¹⁹ Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν πρὸς ταῦτα: εἰ ὁ θεὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, τίς καθ’ ἡμῶν – Paul has emphatically and convincingly stated that God has His plans to save from His wrath those whom He has chosen and predestined to live in the eternal Kingdom of God. Now, coming to the end of his presentation on God’s faithfulness to people through His Spirit, grace, mercy, and the Messiah Jesus, in contrast to the long term and inferior effects of just the Torah with its Mosaic Covenant (whereby people erroneously believe that they can make themselves worthy of His blessing by outwardly following the instructions of the Covenant), Paul asks a rhetorical question as to what an appropriate response should be to all these things that God has done, is doing, and will do. He states the situation as God’s being *for* those whom He has predetermined to rescue from His condemnation, and he compares God’s being *for* us with other created beings or things who might be *against* us. The implied question is, is there someone or something out there which is *against* us such that this person or thing can completely thwart God’s plans and purposes to rescue those whom He has chosen? Indeed, would even God turn against us and disrupt His own plans, or would possibly the Messiah turn against us and disrupt God’s plans?

²²⁰ ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίσεται – Paul calls his readers’ attention to what God has done by not preventing the Son of God, the Messiah, from being mistreated and killed on a cross—and all for our sake, i.e., that we would acquire an advocate at the judgment. He “did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all” (τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν). Thus, it is easy to conclude that, because God has gone to the extent of requiring that the Messiah suffer death on our behalf, that God will not turn against those whom He predestined to eternal salvation. Instead, He will be continue the process of saving authentic believers and being divinely gracious to them so as to grant them everything He has planned for them—eternal mercy and life in the Kingdom of God.

²²¹ τίς ἐγκαλέσει κατὰ ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ; θεὸς ὁ δικαίων – Paul asks if it is possible for someone else to speak up and accuse of wrongdoing those whom God has chosen, so that he undermines God’s plan and even ruins it by convincing Him to condemn them with the result that people who were supposed to be rescued from God’s condemnation end up instead incurring His wrath and justice (τίς ἐγκαλέσει κατὰ ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ)?

Not when we are talking about God’s being the One who grants justification, mercy, and forgiveness to people. The obvious implication is that He and His plan to justify sinners is more powerful than anyone else who may want to thwart God’s plans.

²²² τίς ὁ κατακρινῶν; Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀποθανών, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐγερθεὶς, ὃς καὶ ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν – One might think that, if anyone has the right to disrupt God’s sovereign plans so that He condemn sinners to eternal death, it is the one who was condemned to death by them when they crucified him on the cross (while Paul is implying that those directly involved would have been joined by all those who were not involved at all in the rest of human history, because putting to death God’s Messiah in order to get rid of him is just what sinners do, either directly in Jerusalem two thousand years ago or indirectly, wherever and whenever they live, by rejecting God, Jesus, and biblical truth).

Again, is there someone out there who will prevent God’s chosen people who are inwardly changed from obtaining eternal mercy and life at the judgment? Is there someone who can powerfully bring an accusation against us so that we are condemned instead of forgiven? Not when what is included in God’s plan is a Messiah who died as an offering to God on our behalf, was raised from the dead, who has taken the prime position of responsibility of ruling over the universe, and who acts as our advocate and intercessor at the judgment—even when he has the right to accuse all sinners of being the reason why he died.

²²³ τίς ἡμᾶς χωρίσει ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Χριστοῦ; θλίψις ἢ στενοχωρία ἢ διωγμὸς ἢ λιμὸς ἢ γυμνότης ἢ κίνδυνος ἢ μάχαιρα – In the light of what Paul has just mentioned about the role of the Messiah that includes death on behalf of sinful human beings and intercession for them at the judgment, Paul asks if there is anything in the creation that can prevent authentic believers from completing their own process of showing up at the judgment ready to be granted mercy by God when Jesus appeals to Him for them? Who “will separate us from the love of the Messiah,” which is to say from the love that the Messiah produces for us from God and himself by virtue of his willingness to suffer such pain on the cross? In other words, who can destroy the basis of God’s love, grace, and forgiveness of sinners that Jesus brings by his death on the cross?

The implied question is in regard to anything that would prevent us from persevering in our belief so that we would disqualify ourselves from obtaining God’s mercy. Is anything stronger than God and can thwart His work within us by His Holy Spirit of causing our faith and belief to persevere through all kinds of circumstances in this life that, without His grace, would crush our faith? Is there anything that would prevent the Spirit from causing our genuine inwardness to endure throughout the rest of our lives—including being put to death by others?

See also Romans 5:3ff. where Paul states that God has poured His Holy Spirit into our hearts, thus implying that He has set up permanent residence within us so that nothing in this world, including our own sinfulness and inherent immorality, can separate us from God's love and thereby destroy our belief. Can anything in this world, including ourselves, prevent God's Spirit from keeping our minds open to the truth of Jesus' death on our behalf and from believing in him for our salvation? Of course, the answer is an emphatic NO!

Not any kind of suffering ("affliction"), or emotionally painful experience ("anguish"), or mistreatment by non-Christians ("persecution"), or physical deprivation such as "hunger," "nakedness," or even death by "sword" or some other "danger" in this realm can keep God from finishing His plans for those whom He has chosen and predestined to eternal salvation.

²²⁴ καθὼς γέγραπται οἷτι ἔνεκεν σοῦ θανατούμεθα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν. ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς –

See Psalm 44:22, "But for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered (LXX – ὅτι ἔνεκα σοῦ (קָרַבְנוּ) θανατούμεθα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν. ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς)."

In Psalm 44, the sons of Korah recount both God's great acts on behalf of Israel and their own trust in God. Yet, God has rejected the Jews, so that they are being mistreated by their enemies. Thus, Paul reminds his Gentile Christian readers in Rome that the OT states clearly that followers of Yahweh will encounter resistance, hostility, and death at the hands of non-believers—even in the midst of their authentic belief in, worship of, and obedience to God. Paul's implied exhortation is for these Gentile believers in Rome to adopt the same perspective and attitude as the sons of Korah of Psalm 44 and simply appeal to God to rescue them from their enemies. However, here, the greatest enemy is a person's own sinfulness that could potentially crush his authentic belief and, thereby, disqualify him from obtaining God's mercy and eternal life. Thus, Paul's theology and even Psalm 44 both tell him that God will cause the belief of genuine Christians to persevere in order that they may obtain eternal life—the same way that God will cause Israel to persevere and acquire the condition of being the "great nation" of the Abrahamic Covenant.

²²⁵ ἀλλ' ἐν τούτοις πᾶσιν ὑπερνικῶμεν διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς – Therefore, all the negative circumstances, even death, that occur for authentically changed people result in their being eternally victorious over their "enemies" of affliction, anguish, etc. which potentially could rob them of their belief and eternal life. In the light of the fact that the most important person within the created reality, the Messiah, has loved them by dying for them on a cross in order to qualify to be their advocate at the judgment, nothing can stand in the way of God's completing the process for Christians of causing them to inhabit the eternal Kingdom of God. There is no greater victory for a human being than his never succumbing to the present, crushing pressures to abandon his belief in God and His mercy through the intercessor, Jesus the Messiah, of authentic believers.

²²⁶ πέπεισμαι γὰρ ὅτι οὔτε θάνατος οὔτε ζῶη οὔτε ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἀρχαὶ οὔτε ἐνεστῶτα οὔτε μέλλοντα οὔτε δυνάμεις –

²²⁷ οὔτε ὕψωμα οὔτε βάθος οὔτε τις κτίσις ἑτέρα δυνήσεται ἡμᾶς χωρῖσαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν – Indeed, nothing within the created reality has the power to disconnect us from God's love as exemplified by the Messiah's death on our behalf and that belongs to us because of our association within Jesus as the Messiah through our belief in him. Consequently, it is not by virtue of keeping the Mosaic Covenant at the center of one's life that a person experiences God's eternal love. Instead, it is by the miraculous work of the Spirit inside him that occurs because of God's eternal plan to save him. And it is because of the Messiah, who fulfilled and will fulfill his role as priest at the judgment. In this way, a person is loved by God and rescued by Him from His eternal condemnation (see Romans 5:3ff.).

1) This means that death itself is powerless in the face of God's love.

2) So is life or anything that this life which might present as a challenge to God's power and love.

3) This is true also of any "messenger" of God. This messenger could be in the form of the written Ten Commandments along with the rest of the Mosaic Covenant and the OT. Or it could be in the form of a theophany such as appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18 or Moses in Exodus 3.

4) In addition, religious "rulers" have no ability to thwart God's plans for those whom He will save.

5) & 6) The present and future circumstances in the existence of an authentic believer are never an obstacle to God's plans.

7) And nothing that appears more powerful than a believer in this realm is more powerful than God.

8) & 9) And nothing that is either high or low in its greatness, including economic, political, social, or institutional greatness, can prevent God from following being faithful to His promises on behalf of believers.

10) And finally, nothing that has been created by God (and everything that exists other than God has been created by Him), is more powerful than the Creator and can oppose Him and cause Him to change His plans for those whom He has chosen to save.

²²⁸ Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ – Having stated categorically in chapters 1-8 that Jesus as the Messiah is the basis of obtaining both the Abrahamic promises of a great nation for Israel and eternal life for authentic believers, Paul's objective now in chapters 9-11 is to show that, even though both Jews and Gentiles obtain God's blessing of eternal life through only the Messiah and not the Mosaic Covenant, God is still being faithful to His promise to the Jews to bless them in history as a special group of people.

Nevertheless, not all Jews will enjoy the fulfillment of this promise, which obviously would come as a surprise to the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day. And Paul implies that this would also be a major objection of the Jews to the gospel of Jesus the Messiah which Paul is preaching. Therefore, in this section Paul defends his perspective on the gospel, which does not need the Mosaic Covenant in order for a person to have an acceptable standing before God, i.e., to be *dikaios* = qualified to receive eternal mercy

and life. A person needs only belief in and obedience to the Messiah. Even so, God has not forgotten the very people to whom He gave the Abrahamic promises and the Mosaic Covenant, the Jews. Indeed, He made these promises specifically to them—that on the land of Israel He would shape them into the greatest and most powerful nation in all human history (see Genesis 12:1-3). In 9:1-5, Paul defends himself against the accusation that he is anti-Jewish and has invented a false religion. He is convinced that, by means of the Spirit of God (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ), who has opened his eyes to the truth of the gospel and who has been his teacher the entire time that he has restudied and taught the gospel, his understanding of the Bible testifies and bears witness with his logical sense of what is right and true that he is correctly teaching the truth (συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς). In other words, Paul not only knows the truth, but he senses it as true within his very being. And in this case, the truth leads him to feel great and painful sorrow for his fellow Jews who are unbelievers (similar to what Paul felt in Romans 7 regarding experiencing his continued sin even as a genuine believer in God and Jesus). Indeed, He will go on to say that he would rather be eternally condemned if all his fellow Jews would be saved. But he also knows that God’s plan has always been to create two different kinds of Jews—one group, the larger group in fact, who will be eternally condemned, and a smaller group, the “remnant,” who will receive God’s mercy in the Kingdom of God. This is similar to what God does with Gentiles, that He rescues a smaller group from His eternal condemnation, while God condemns and destroys the larger group.

²²⁹ ὅτι λύπη μοί ἐστιν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὀδύνη τῇ καρδίᾳ μου – Paul’s heart breaks for his fellow Jews, which is probably the majority of them in his day (and a situation that has always been the case, that the majority of Jews (and Gentiles) do not have authentic belief), who have refused to embrace their own Messiah, because he knows that they currently stand to incur God’s wrath, condemnation, and destruction.

²³⁰ ἠχρόμην γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα – If it were actually possible, which theologically it is not, Paul would be willing to swap places with his fellow unbelieving Jews, who are his “brothers” in the nation of Israel, i.e., of the same ethnic and cultural group, who are committed to obeying both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, but not with authentic belief. He is willing to be damned by God if they will all genuinely believe in Jesus as the Messiah and obtain God’s salvation from eternal destruction.

²³¹ οἵτινες εἰσιν Ἰσραηλίται, ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι – Paul now lists the various benefits from God that the Jews have received. These are the ethnic, theological, and cultural qualifications which make them the chosen people of God within the history of the present realm—

- 1) They are physical descendants of Israel, i.e., Jacob, to whom God promised to fulfill the same promises which He made to Abraham of making them the “great nation” of history and to grant them eternal life because of their having the same kind of belief as Abraham.
- 2) They have acquired the status of “sons”, meaning children, of God within the present realm, meaning that God has a special purpose for them in human history—to demonstrate His characteristics directly through them (e.g., He has clearly and explicitly exercised both His judgment and His grace on them at various points in their history as His people). Indeed, God says in Exodus 4:22, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.”
- 3) The best option for interpreting the “glory” that belongs to the Jews is that God will eventually grant them the most honored position of all people groups when He shapes them into the “great nation” of the millennial kingdom upon Jesus’ return. Another, but less likely, option is that God has manifested just how awesome and to be admired He is at various times in the Jews’ history, e.g., miraculously rescuing them from the Egyptians under the leadership of Moses. I think that the first option, referring to the Jews’ destiny, is better and more profound.
- 4) He has given the several “covenants” by which they maintain their relationship with one another as it pertains to both the present realm, where they will become the most powerful nation in human history during the millennial kingdom, and the future eternal realm, where they will live with all other believers on an eternal earth. These covenants are the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New as explicitly explained in the OT.
- 5) God has given to and instructed the Jews with the written “Torah,” the OT scriptures, which are inerrant and infallible (see **Romans 3:1** What then is the advantage of being a Jew, or what is the benefit of circumcision? **2** Great in every respect! Primarily, because they were entrusted with the messages of God).
- 6) God has specifically and uniquely designed the manner of their “worship” of Him through the Mosaic Covenant with its Levitical priesthood and required offerings and sacrifices in Jerusalem and at the temple of Paul’s day.
- 7) God has communicated His “promises” for the Jews (and for all mankind) through them as His chosen group of people, starting with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. These promises include transforming them into “a great nation” who are all circumcised of heart, living on the land of Israel, ruled by their Messiah and king, Jesus, properly obeying the Mosaic Covenant, and ruling over the rest of the world (see Genesis 12:1,2; Deuteronomy 28,30; Jeremiah 23 & 33; Zechariah 6). They also include eternal life for those Jews who imitate Abraham’s belief.

²³² ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν – Continuing the list of ethnic, theological, and cultural qualifications of the Jews and their being God’s chosen people, Paul includes—

- 8) that the “fathers,” the great men and women of the faith in the Old Testament, starting with Abraham, are Jews, e.g., Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, et al., who are not only the greatest people in human history, but also the ancestors of the current Jews, to whom they look for instruction about God.

9) God has also brought into physical existence, “that which is according to the flesh,” the “Messiah” through the Jews, and he rules and rescues people from every ethnic group. He is first and foremost the Jews’ Messiah, but certainly, as Paul has argued, he is also the Messiah of any genuine believer in human history. And the Messiah technically rules over all things that God has made, because this is the role that God grants to the Son of God by virtue of the Davidic Covenant (see Psalm 8). He is “over all things”—except God.

Paul also uses what I think is a parenthetical phrase, because it begins with the neuter, and not the masculine, definite article τὸ. After commenting that the Messiah is from the Israelites, the Jews, Paul parenthetically indicates that he is such “according to the flesh,” which is to say that Jesus as the Messiah is no different physically speaking from his fellow Jews. It is after this parenthetical statement that Paul says also that the Messiah is “above all things.” Again, this is in line with the whole concept of the Son of God of the Davidic Covenant. The king of Israel was always God’s proxy and human representative on the earth with the authority to rule over the entirety of God’s creation.

Paul follows the above list of the important characteristics of the Jews as God’s earthly chosen people with a doxology, praising God into eternity for His plans and purposes for the Jews. This is not a statement about Jesus and his divinity. It is a statement about the transcendent creator of all reality, who has brought all this into existence. First and foremost, God has made the Jews the most theologically privileged people in the world. There is no other people group that have the continued and persistent attention of God, who have received God’s covenants and His promises to remain faithful to them in spite of their unfaithfulness to Him, who can turn to their sacred literature, the Old Testament, and learn how to live life well, and who can point to one of their own and say, “Here is the most important being in all of cosmic history—OUR Messiah!” And yet, as Paul said back at the beginning of chapter 3, they have not lived up to their calling—at least not yet. They will do so eventually, and the whole creation expectantly waits for this moment (according to chapter 8), when Jesus returns and all the Jews worship and obey God with changed hearts as He has longed for them to do since He rescued them from slavery in Egypt and gave them the Mosaic Covenant.

Thus, how could Paul not ache for his fellow Jews who are for the most part rejecting their role as God’s earthly chosen people by rejecting all that God has been and will be doing with them and through them.

Another verse in the NT that has a similar word structure to the very end of this verse is [2 Corinthians 11:31](#) The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever (ὁ ὢν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας), knows that I am not lying.

There is also [Ephesians 1:3](#) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

²³³ Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ – In 9:6-13 Paul argues that God never promised each and every individual Jew to receive His blessings, but only the group of people and nation, whereby eventually the whole group, all the living Jews, at a particular point in history will become genuine believers. In other words, God always intended that there be two different kinds of Jews. There are those who are simply physical descendants of Jacob, i.e., “from Israel.” And there are those who not only are physical descendants of Jacob, but they also are of the “Israel” who will actually experience God’s promises because of their changed hearts and authentic belief that is like Abraham’s, Isaac’s, and Jacob’s. Therefore, “the message of God” has not “failed,” because never planned to make His message apply to all the Jews. Paul puts it this way, that “all those who are from Israel,” the Jews who physically descend from Jacob, are “not Israel,” the physical descendants of Jacob who will enjoy God’s fulfilling His promises to them (by means of His changing their hearts). In other words, a sub-group of Jews will receive the promises of God, while the other sub-group of Jews will not. This is “the message of God” that has not “failed,” that God intended to call the nation of Israel as His chosen people while only some of them would eventually acquire the fulfillment of His promises.

Thus, Paul anticipates a criticism of his gospel, that in spite of all the things that make the Jewish people God’s chosen ones in the present realm, including the promise to bless any of them who have the same belief as Abraham and to make of them a great nation, it sure appears as though God is failing to follow through on His promises to them. And the main piece of evidence regarding God’s failure is the lack of belief in the Messiah among the Jews. These are the Messiah’s own group of people, his own countrymen, in that he descends from Jacob and therefore from Isaac and Abraham just as they do. However, Paul makes the remarkable statement that simply being a physical descendant of Israel/Jacob does not qualify a person for inclusion in receiving God’s promises and blessings—when this must have been the mentality of the Jews of Jesus’ and Paul’s day, who were making every human effort to guard in their minds and actions and with every fiber of their being the Mosaic Covenant. But Paul is saying that God has chosen only certain individual descendants of Jacob to whom He will fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel. It is his chosen few who will fill out all the qualifications of being Paul’s (and Jesus’) “fellow-countrymen” (see 9:3) with their belief. Therefore, not all Jews will be included in the “great nation” of the one Abrahamic promise and in the eternal kingdom of the other Abrahamic promise.

Another option for interpreting who is the “Israel” of God is to go in the direction of Covenant Theology where, since the first appearance of Jesus, the Church of mainly Gentiles and some Jews is the new Israel. This is because the Jews consistently disobeyed God, especially by rejecting their Messiah, Jesus, and as a result God has rejected them. Thus, Paul is saying that “all those who are from Israel,” i.e., the Jews, are not “Israel,” because it is comprised of a mass of believing Gentile Christians and some believing Jewish Christians. This means too that all the promises that God made to the Jews in the Old Testament transfer to the Church so that, for example, the promised land of Canaan/Israel is now heaven where Christians spend eternity. But I think that the evidence in both the Old Testament and the New Testament demonstrates that God will still fulfill His earthly promises to the Jews and that believing Gentiles will join the Jews in enjoying these promises even during the millennial kingdom of

Revelation 20 when Jesus will rule over the Jews on the land of Israel and over the Gentile world of the rest of the earth. Romans 11 will reveal this to us. Plus, believing that the Church has replaced the Jews is the same as calling God a liar when He clearly spoke of the nation of Israel in the OT.

²³⁴ οὐδ' ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ' ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα – In Genesis 21, a controversy arises in Sarah's mind regarding Abraham's two children, Ishmael and Isaac. The former, who is Abraham's son by Sarah's Egyptian handmaid Hagar, mocks the latter, who is Abraham's son by Sarah, and it upsets her so much that she wants Abraham to expel Ishmael from their house. But this upsets Abraham, because he apparently loves Ishmael. After all, he is his son. But God tells him not to worry and to do what Sarah wants, because He will make Ishmael's descendants a great nation too, while it is also true that "in Isaac will your [Abraham's] seed be named" (see Genesis 21:12).

There are two options for what God means—

1) Like the statement God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed," God is saying that all individuals from the various ethnic groups in the world who imitate Isaac's faith will obtain the same blessing as he, eternal life. In this case, "the seed [who are] named" are the future individuals who have genuine belief, whether Jews or Gentiles.

2) It is through Isaac as the *promised* son that God will continue to deal with Abraham's physical descendants. This means, for example, that it will be Isaac's descendants, starting with Jacob and his twelve sons, with whom God makes the Mosaic Covenant, not Ishmael's descendants. Plus, it will be Isaac's descendants, not Ishmael's descendants, who eventually become the "great nation" with the Messiah ruling over them and their acquiring genuine belief.

I think that option #2 makes more sense, that God is assuring Abraham that He will grace Isaac's descendants with the function and role ("name") of being the chosen people of God right on up to their becoming the "great nation" of the millennial kingdom. Thus, God declares that Isaac is the son and heir of the promises He made to Abraham in Genesis 12. Ishmael is not. As a result, the "children of the flesh" of the next verse are those who came through Abraham's manipulating the situation by having physical children through Hagar, Sarah's servant, while the "children of the promise" are those who came physically through Sarah. The latter are the "seed" of Abraham which is the same as saying that they are "children of God." To them as a group of people belong the "adoption as sons" of Romans 9:4.

Consequently, by drawing an analogy between those who are truly "Israel" and God's promised physical son to Abraham, Paul is saying that not all physical children (whether Abraham's, Isaac's, or Jacob's) are going to be spiritual descendants of Abraham in the sense that they will participate in the greatness of his nation or that they will acquire eternal life (because to do one is to do the other).

In this way, Paul is establishing that God's promise is what is important for any human being's receiving God's blessing, not the person's direct ethnic link with Abraham and the patriarchs. By implication, he is also establishing that it will be Jews of authentic belief who will be the true "seed" of Abraham. As a result, there are always two things going on with respect to the Jews as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—

1) One is that they play a special role in human history as a specific ethnic and cultural group—the earthly chosen people of God of both belief and unbelief.

2) The other is that their role ultimately requires that they be people of authentic belief, which will be the case only when Jesus returns and God changes the heart of every Jew still living—the millennial kingdom of the earthly chosen Jewish people of God, who will all have genuine belief.

See [Genesis 21:12](#) But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through [in, by means of] Isaac your descendants will be named (עַרְבֵי לְךָ אֲרָבִים בְּיִצְחָק) (ὅτι ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα).

²³⁵ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζεται εἰς σπέρμα – Paul continues with this line of reasoning and says again that those who can truly call themselves "children of God" physically speaking and, therefore, the "seed" of Abraham physically speaking to whom God made His promises in Genesis 12 are those whom God promises to Abraham through Sarah, meaning Isaac and his physical descendants. This is instead of Ishmael's being able to claim any of these labels.

Also, Paul's greater point is that just as Ishmael was not the son whom God promised, so also there will be physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who on the one hand are "promised" from God (physically), but on the other hand will not inherit the fulfillment of both promises of God of being a "great nation" and acquiring eternal life (as spiritual descendants with authentic belief). They may be members of the group of people who are "chosen" by God, i.e., physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the Jews), but they are not eternally Abraham's "seed," because they do not have authentic belief.

Of course, this would be a radical and even offensive perspective to the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day (and our day) who wholeheartedly believed that simply because they physically were Jews and were religiously following the Mosaic Covenant, they would receive all God's blessings and the fulfillment of His promises.

²³⁶ ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος· κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρα υἱός – Paul quotes from Genesis 18:10 & 14 when God appears to Abraham and declares that He will return the following year which will result in Sarah's bearing him a son. The next statement in Genesis is that Sarah was past the age of childbearing, meaning that God would make the impossible happen. But Paul's point is that God basically promised Abraham that he would have a child—through Sarah and

not through Hagar. Thus, God’s making a statement to the effect that something was going to happen is the same as His promising it. Therefore, Isaac, who was born a year later, can legitimately be labelled a “child of God,” because he did not come into existence merely as a physical descendant of Abraham like Ishmael, but also as someone whom God promised. In other words, God *promised* Isaac to exist. He *did not promise* that Ishmael would exist.

And this point is true whether or not Isaac ends up being a person of genuine belief like his father Abraham. Even if he was not, he was still a son who was promised by God. Nevertheless, it does seem from the rest of Isaac’s story that he was a man of authentic belief.

What about Ishmael? He theoretically could have had genuine belief, but he was not the promised physical son as Isaac. Thus, Paul is using God’s speaking of Isaac’s being promised as Abraham’s physical descendant to emphasize the necessity of promise that results in any one of the Jews’ also being a spiritual descendant of Abraham.

²³⁷ Οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ῥεβέκκα ἐξ ἐνὸς κοίτην ἔχουσα, Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν – Paul now uses another physical situation to make his point about God’s promises and intention in regard to individual Jews who will acquire the fulfillment of His promise regarding the great nation of Israel and eternal life. The circumstances of Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob say the same thing, that when God says that something is going to happen, it is the same as His promising it. And it just so happens that the circumstances involve the “promised” son of Abraham, Isaac. After he was born, grew up, and was married to Rebekah, she became pregnant by Isaac, this famous patriarch, to whom all Jews claim a physical connection (through Jacob, too, of course) that they think means that God will bless them.

²³⁸ μήπω γὰρ γεννηθέντων μηδὲ πραξάντων τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαῦλον, ἵνα ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ μένη – Paul is saying that God made a planned purposeful choice (ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ) about the twin boys, Esau and Jacob, that was not based on their moral behavior and obedience to Him. This would be radically different from the perspective of the Jews of Jesus’ and Paul’s day. They believed that, in addition to their being the chosen people of God as physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they would gain God’s blessings and the fulfillment of His promises by their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, that their choices mattered to the extent that God relied on them alone to determine exactly how He will respond to them. In other words, they must have also believed that somehow Abraham earned the right to be chosen by God.

But Paul is saying that God makes sovereign choices in regard to people before and regardless of their moral choices. In other words, He determines their destinies, and he will go on to say that He determines even their existential choices before they are even born, and by extrapolation, before their mothers become pregnant with them.

Therefore, the fulfillment of God’s promises are not ultimately dependent on human beings’ choices and their response to Him as their God. Instead, God chooses beforehand according to His divine and sovereign plan and purposes how human beings will choose to respond to Him and what role they will play in human history, including whether or not one of a Abraham’s, Isaac’s, and Jacob’s physical descendants will be someone who will eventually become his spiritual descendant and a member of the “great nation” of Israel.

Romans 8:28 And we know for those who love God that everything works together for their good, for those who have been called according to His plan (πρόθεσιν).

²³⁹ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος, ἐρρέθη αὐτῇ ὅτι ὁ μείζων δουλεύσει τῷ ἐλάσσονι – Genesis 25:23d, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה בְּרֵךְ אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת עֵשָׂו בְּרֵךְ (καὶ ὁ μείζων δουλεύσει τῷ ἐλάσσονι).

Paul indicates that God declared to Rebekah that the older son of the two in her womb would not acquire the blessing of his father and therefore of Abraham, even though it would be expected that he would in that culture. Instead, Jacob, the younger son, would receive this blessing, even though we now know that he did so through deceitful means. Therefore, it is Jacob who becomes “Israel,” “the one who wrestles with God,” when He changes his name. In other words, just as God’s promise produces “children of God” and “seed” of Abraham, i.e., spiritual descendants of Abraham within the nation of Israel, in the same manner that God promised the physical descendant Isaac, so also God’s sovereign purposeful choice produces them. His plans, purposes, and promises are all working in conjunction with one another. On the one hand, God produces physical descendants (Isaac, Esau, and Jacob) through them, and, on the other hand, He produces spiritual descendants (Isaac and Jacob, but not Esau) among the Jews, the actual nation of Israel, through them.

²⁴⁰ καθὼς γέγραπται τὸν Ἰακώβ ἠγάπησα, τὸν δὲ Ἡσαῦ ἐμίσησα – Malachi 1:2d,3a, וְיָשִׁיב יְהוָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת עֵשָׂו בְּרֵךְ (καὶ ἠγάπησα τὸν Ἰακωβ), וְאֶת עֵשָׂו בְּרֵךְ (τὸν δὲ Ἡσαῦ ἐμίσησα).

The basic meaning of שׂוֹנֵא seems to be hate, even with an emotional and visceral component within human beings. But in this context, as well as others, to “hate” someone is simply to reject him and exclude him from a privileged position that will result in a most beneficial outcome.

Theologically, as demonstrated by various statements about different people in OT history, we can picture that God has chosen to open His arms and draw Jacob (and his physical descendants) close to Him by granting some of them authentic belief in order to fulfill all the Abrahamic promises within their group of people. In this case, it will be Jacob’s descendants, and not Esau’s, i.e., some of Jacob’s descendants, who will become the “great nation” of Israel and who will acquire eternal life—both of which will be because they have genuine belief.

In other words, God is saying that with בְּרֵךְ, divine love, He reached out and embraced Jacob (even sinful Jacob who legally

deserved only His condemnation), thus positioning him within the Abrahamic promises of being a “great nation” on the land of Israel and acquiring eternal life. In contrast, God is saying that with **ἄδικία**, divine rejection, He pushed Esau away, thus positioning him outside the promises of Abraham *in their fullness*, i.e., that involve all the promises. Esau’s descendants (also known as the Edomites) will not be the “great nation” as an ethnic group, even if some of them become authentic believers. It will be some of Jacob’s descendants who acquire authentic belief at some time during their existence and who become the most powerful nation in history. And these past and future actions by God are all on the basis of His own independent, sovereign, purposeful choice—apart from anything that either Jacob or Esau have done, because God made the choice before they were even born (v. 11). Therefore, neither mere physical descendency (see vs. 8,9) nor human actions (vs. 10-13) are the *ultimate* basis for a person’s relationship with God and participating in the fulfillment of His promises that include the greatness of the Jews in the present realm and eternal life in this temporary realm and in the eternal realm. It is God’s plans, purposes, promises, and choices (through the activities of the Messiah!) that are the basis.

²⁴¹ Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; μὴ ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ; μὴ γένοιτο – In these next verses of 9:14-29, Paul admits that it seems unfair that God discriminates between individuals without taking into account their good or evil moral behavior, that He chooses some Jews to obtain the fulfillment of His promises which will include eternal mercy, i.e., “Israel” comprised of some of the physical descendants of Jacob/Israel, and He chooses others not to receive His mercy. God chooses to “love” some and to “reject” others—even Jews within the nation of Israel who are His chosen people as an ethnic group. However, Paul will say that God is like a potter and the Jews (and, by extrapolation, all human beings) are clay pots whom He is sovereignly and independently shaping on His potter’s wheel. He is the one who literally creates and makes us all blameworthy and then condemns some while also having mercy on others. As a result, the only obvious conclusion to Paul’s explanation is that God is the author of a story, and we are the characters whom He is using within the story to tell it exactly as any human author does with the characters within his novel or story.

But, for us who do not at all feel like characters within a story and who feel completely free from any author, including God, Paul now asks if there is “injustice with God” (**ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ**), that it is unfair of Him to be orchestrating history with some people, the Jews, being given His promises and with only some of them actually receiving the fulfillment of His promises and His blessings without checking in with all people and taking into account their free will choices—so that He would then reward them commensurately, with eternal life, if they demonstrate appropriate belief and obedience, and with eternal condemnation, if they demonstrate appropriate unbelief and disobedience.

Paul’s answer to his own question is, “Absolutely not!” The plain fact is that it is neither unjust nor unfair for God to deal with people as He does (and as he will go on to argue)—by the very nature of the dynamic which exists between God as the transcendent Creator and human beings as His creatures. Nevertheless, this dynamic is one of the most difficult concepts for us human beings to grasp and to accept, but Paul states categorically that it is true.

²⁴² τῷ Μωϋσεῖ γὰρ λέγει· ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω – Paul quotes exactly the Septuagint of Exodus 33:19 to the effect that God chooses the sinful human beings to whom He will exercise mercy. This was during the process of demonstrating His magnificence personally to Moses when He hid him in the cleft of the rock so that he would not be destroyed by His glory. It was as if God was saying, “Yes, I am glorious and magnificent, and you need to understand that My sovereignty over human history, including who receives My forgiveness and who does not, is at the very height of what it means for Me to glorious—because I am the transcendent Author of this story and no human being exists, thinks, feels, or acts except I cause him to do so.”

Exodus 33:19 And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of Yahweh before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion (**וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִרְחַמֵּנִי וְיִרְחַמֵּנִי וְיִרְחַמֵּנִי**) (καὶ ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ, καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω).”

It is important to remember the context, that Paul’s concern for his fellow Jews is that they are not demonstrating authentic faith and having received God’s mercy/grace and compassion by believing in Jesus as the Messiah. And Paul has argued that only some Jews will receive such from God on the basis of His purposeful choice. Is this unjust of God? No, Paul says, because God has mercy/grace on whom He chooses—even according to the Old Testament, which is to say that the Old Testament assumes the exact same relational dynamic between God and human beings as the New Testament and Paul, who now goes on to explain more explicitly this dynamic.

²⁴³ ἄρα οὖν οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος οὐδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ – Indeed, it does not seem fair as to who receives mercy and who does not—if God chooses independently of people’s willful actions, i.e., what they desire and how they run, meaning willfully set the course of their lives that involves what they ultimately want out of life so that they exert themselves in a particular mode of living and toward a particular goal (οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος οὐδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος).

Our natural inclination is to think that everyone should receive what they deserve according to what they do independently of everyone else, including God! Instead, Paul is saying, in the situation of Moses, who might have wanted God to be merciful to all Jews who had rebelled at that time against Him and worshiped the golden calf, it would be only God who determined to whom He granted mercy.

Thus, Paul is saying that it (God’s granting someone mercy) does not belong to the one who wills (the human being and his choices), but it belongs to God who is merciful (and His choices that are completely independent of the human being’s choices).

The final say as to who receives God’s mercy is God, not man. No human being controls history in any sort of *ultimate* sense, even and most especially with respect to God’s dispensing His forgiveness and compassion towards abject sinners (which of course includes all human beings created or born with sinfulness as their innate moral condition, i.e., all human beings, including Adam and Eve, except Jesus).

This is not to say that sinful human beings have the innate ability to “will/desire” genuinely God’s mercy and to “run” their lives in such a way that they correctly satisfy the condition which God has placed on us in order to obtain His mercy and eternal life, but then God refuses to give them what they genuinely want! Paul is saying that both God’s choice to give sinners His mercy and His choice to cause them to satisfy the necessary condition in order for Him to do so for eternity originate with God who “performs mercy,” and not with man—as Paul goes on to explain even more explicitly.

Galatians 2:2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain (μη πως εις κενον τρέχω η ἔδραμον).

Galatians 5:7 You were running well (Ἐτρέχετε καλωσ); who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Philippians 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain (οτι ουκ εις κενον ἔδραμον ουδε εις κενον ἐκοπίασα).

²⁴⁴ λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή τῷ Φαραῶ ὅτι εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξηγήρα σε ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν δυνάμιν μου καὶ ὅπως διαγγελῆ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ – Paul then confirms his previous statement with a biblical example of God’s sovereign rule and control of one individual in particular, the ruler of Egypt. God used Pharaoh, an abject unbeliever and a man who was in completely unwilling to submit to Him, not to save Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, but to save the Israelites. God used the choices and the death of the sinful king of Egypt to rescue His people from their slavery to him in Egypt. While He displayed His harsh justice towards Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God also displayed His strong mercy and compassion towards Moses and the Jews. And both elements of His character in this specific human moment of history were in existence and on display, so that people would have something with which to refer to remind them of just how great God is—even if it involved the suffering and death of many Egyptians who certainly never asked for God’s judgment and justice on them. Nor did they ask for His mercy. The Pharaoh and his people were born in a moral state of being unwilling to seek and to obey God, and they remained such up through the tenth plague when God killed the firstborn of human beings and animals in every Egyptian household. The passage which Paul quotes is,

Exodus 9:16 “But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth (וְלִמְעַן יִתְּכַתְּרַתְּ אֶת־הַתְּהִלָּה בְּעַבְדִּי מִצְרַיִם וְלִמְעַן יִתְּכַתְּרַתְּ אֶת־הַתְּהִלָּה בְּעַבְדִּי מִצְרַיִם) (καὶ ἔνεκεν τούτου διετηρήθης, ἵνα ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν μου, καὶ ὅπως διαγγελῆ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ).” God is explicitly saying to Pharaoh that He has directed his life as an Egyptian in order to make him king of the Egyptians and cause him to make the choices that he is making, so that God can demonstrate His transcendent power and sovereign power over the creation and so that who He is and what He is all about can be proclaimed throughout the Ancient Near East, i.e., the “earth” and world of the Egyptians and Israelites. In other words, the Pharaoh’s choices originated ultimately with God and not with Pharaoh—the same way that the Jews’ (those “from Israel” and those who end up actually being “Israel”) choices either to believe God or to reject God always originate with Him and not with them.

²⁴⁵ ἄρα οὖν ὃν θέλει ἔλαεῖ, ὃν δὲ θέλει σκληρύνει – Here is Paul’s bottom line. His conclusion from these statements is that God is the sovereign determiner of people’s roles on earth with respect to His mercy and judgment. If God chooses to have mercy on a person, then He does so by softening their inwardness and making them committed to Him at the level of their heart. If God chooses to exercise His judgment towards a person, then He further hardens their already present unwilling inwardness so that He is justified in passing judgment on them.

As I said, this is not easy either to understand or to accept as Paul will go on to say by asking and answering the next rhetorical question in v. 19.

The two verses below from Hebrews demonstrate that we human beings have an existential responsibility to direct our hearts, minds, and wills towards God and the truth in the midst of God’s being the sovereign determiner of all that we are and do—

Hebrews 3:8 [Psalm 95:8] Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

²⁴⁶ Ἐρεῖς μοι οὖν· τί οὖν ἔτι μέμφεται; τῷ γὰρ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ τίς ἀνθέστηκεν – Now Paul asks another vital and obvious question. How can God hold people accountable for their choices if He is the One who ultimately determines their choices as to whether or not they do what is good or evil and whether or not they qualify or disqualify for His mercy or His judgment? How can He condemn human beings who cannot “resist His will” (τῷ γὰρ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ τίς ἀνθέστηκεν) that causes their choices whereby they are unwilling to obey Him? Here, of course, Paul is referring to God’s transcendent and uncreated “will” or desire or plan, not to man’s “will” (βούλημα) or plan as in the Acts and 1 Peter verses below.

In other words, does it really make sense and is it even right that God is the Author of all human beings and all their decisions in life, and then He judges, condemns, and punishes them for being evil—or even grants them mercy and eternal life according to His choice and not theirs? If God creates and makes people to be innately unwilling to obey Him by means of His sovereign control over all the creation, including people’s choices, then how is it right for Him to say that they deserve to be punished for

their disobedience? Or how is it right that He ultimately choose who will believe in Him and receive His grace and mercy? Paul's answer to these thorny questions is going to be how important and necessary it is that we, who are created, understand the exact relationship between God's being the uncreated and transcendent Creator and our existence as created personal and individual human beings, even though we have our own "wills," i.e., our choice making mechanisms, that are free from the creation, while God has His own "will" and choice making mechanism that is free from anything and everything else. It just seems to make sense to us that, if anyone else controls our choices, we are not accountable for them.

Acts 27:43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention (τοῦ βουλήματος), and commanded that those who could swim should ¹jump overboard first and get to land.

1 Peter 4:3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles (τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν κατειργάσθαι), having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries

²⁴⁷ ὁ ἄνθρωπε, μενοῦνγε σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ ἀνταποκρινόμενος τῷ θεῷ; μὴ ἐρεῖ τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι τί με ἐποίησας οὕτως – Paul has argued that the nature and quality of God's relationship with people, their eternal destiny, and their daily human choices are all three *ultimately* dependent on God's plans, purposes, and desires, not on them. Therefore, it would seem to make sense, philosophically and judicially, that people are not accountable for their choices, because God is the final cause of them. If someone else controls our choices, then that person should be held accountable for what we do, whether good or bad. Paul has just said that, in the case of our choices as human beings in the light of God's choices as the transcendent Creator, no one can "resist His will" and do other than what He causes them to do. However, Paul now argues that it is perfectly theological and rational that God can both cause people's choices from His transcendent position as their Creator as well as hold them morally accountable for their existential and human choices within the creation—as nonsensical as this sounds initially. And this is in the midst of a human being's actually objecting to God's holding him accountable for his choices and defending himself against God's transcendent causation of his choices—all which ironically are being caused by God's transcendent causation! In other words, any human being who argues against God's holding him accountable for his choices is being caused to argue in this manner as a result of God's causing him to do so. And God even holds him accountable for objecting to His transcendent causation and assigning moral accountability to his choices.

But, honestly, does this really make sense? And Paul's answer is an unequivocal, Yes! On what basis? Paul uses the analogy of a potter who is shaping the lump of clay on his wheel, and he states, "The thing which is molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?"

Like an author who creates characters and their events, both good and evil, in the story which he is writing, so that the events stem from both his desires and the characters' desires and personal choices, God does the same thing with human beings whom He has created. Therefore, in the final analysis, the story of God's novel reveals certain truths about Himself—about His justice and mercy, the latter especially requiring that evil and unrighteousness exist. In other words, human and cosmic history is the story of God's own self-expression. Nevertheless, there are things in our individual lives that do not relate directly to eternity but that do reveal God and His thoughtfulness, rationality, and creativity. These are things such as chess, tennis, architecture, art, etc. Consequently, Paul is not rebuking his hypothetical questioner for asking the question about God's holding people accountable for their choices. Instead, he is exhorting him to think carefully about the precise relationship between God and him. God is the molder or author, and he is the clay on God's potter's wheel or the character in God's novel.

Again, in both cases, does it make sense that the lump of clay on the potter's wheel or the character in the novel object to what the potter or the author is doing with him? Does it really make sense for the clay or character to speak to the potter or author and object to how his Creator has made him and the fact that He is holding him accountable for his choices—as if the clay or character is completely independent of the potter or the author? No. Why? Because the clay or character is entirely dependent on his maker for every detail of his existence, because it only makes sense that the Creator causes every detail of the clay or character—including its choices! Therefore, if the maker of the clay or character holds it accountable for its choices, then he certainly has the right to do so, so that even the clay's or character's questioning his Creator is simply part of the story. And this further reveals just how in control and justified in holding any human being accountable for his choices the Creator actually is! As the prophet Isaiah states, **Isaiah 29:15** 'Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from Yahweh, and whose deeds are done in a dark place. And they say, "Who sees us?" or "Who knows us?"' **29:16** You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, "He did not make me"; or what is formed say to him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?"

Paul partially quotes the verse of 29:16 above to the effect that Isaiah's and his questions are rhetorical—that the clay has no right to complain to the potter about how he made him.

²⁴⁸ ἢ οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν ὁ κεραμεὺς τοῦ πηλοῦ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φεράματος ποιῆσαι ὁ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν σκευὸς ὁ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν – And so Paul asks the question directly, "Does not the potter of the clay have the right to make from the same lump one clay pot for honor and another clay pot for dishonor?"

Just as it is unthinkable that a piece of clay on a potter's wheel would tell the potter what kind of object to make him, it is also unthinkable that we human beings would tell God what kind of person to make us—one who is granted eternal life according to His grace and mercy, i.e., an honorable clay pot like a vase which holds beautiful flowers, or one who is destroyed eternally according to His justice and condemnation, i.e., a dishonorable clay pot like a chamber pot.

God as the transcendent Creator is theologically, legally, morally, and rationally entitled to make some human beings who will enjoy His eternal mercy and some human beings who will experience His eternal destruction. The entire creation is all His

creation, and He has the right to do with it and its every detail, including the decisions and choices of human beings, whatever He desires—just as a potter has the right to shape the lump on his wheel exactly the way that he desires. Therefore, it is also perfectly rational that this be the case, because whatever is theological must also be rational. Truth always makes sense, and if an idea does not make sense, then it is neither theological/biblical nor rational.

²⁴⁹ εἰ δὲ θέλων ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὀργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατὸν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκεν ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκευὴ ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπόλειαν – Two options for the extent of the “clay pots” (σκευή) in this verse—

- 1) Paul is speaking of Jews in this context (see 9:1-13 especially), or
- 2) Paul is speaking of all human beings, Jews and Gentiles (see 9:14-18, 24 with the references to Pharaoh and Gentiles respectively).

Originally, I was inclined to conclude that #1 makes more sense with the quotes from Hosea 1:10; 2:23, and Isaiah 10:22,23 in vs. 25-29. But I think that Paul is using these passages from the Old Testament prophets in regard to the Jews to make the point that God makes the same kind of choices among both Jews and Gentiles. Consequently, Paul is saying that there are two kinds of sinful human beings (clay pots, σκευή) according to God’s purposes—

- 1) First, God has made some of the nation of Israel and some among the Gentiles to be fundamentally and continuously immoral to the end of their lives in order to display His justice, wrath, condemnation, and destruction of them. Therefore, throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament and up to the time of Jesus (to which Paul must be referring since he is living in the first century A.D.), God has patiently put up with their wholesale rebellion against Him until He is ready for them to die and proceed towards eternal destruction. And the same dynamic exists in His relationship with Gentiles.

²⁵⁰ καὶ ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκευῇ ἐλέους ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν –

- 2) Second, Paul goes on to say that God’s patient endurance of both Jews and Gentiles, whom He has made to disobey Him throughout their entire lives, is in order that He may take other Jews and other Gentiles, who are just as fundamentally immoral, but NOT CONTINUOUSLY throughout their whole lives on earth, and display the magnificence of His mercy and forgiveness towards them.

These latter people were always slated by God and His sovereign choice to reach eternal life and an existence of moral perfection, which is their glory and magnificence. And there will eventually be some Jews who will be mortal but will become authentic believers at the beginning of and during the millennial kingdom. They will experience God’s and Jesus’ glory on this earth as sinners of authentic belief until they die and achieve immortality and moral perfection like those who are transformed when Jesus returns. And there will be some believing Gentiles who will participate in Jesus’ and the Jews’ ruling over the world during this same period of time. After the millennial kingdom, all believing Jews and Gentiles from history will then experience the glory of the eternal earth within the eternal universe that God will bring into existence after He destroys this earth and this created reality after the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20.

²⁵¹ Οὗς καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν – Paul indicates that he, and by extrapolation the Roman Gentile Christians who are his readers, are those who experience God’s mercy by His choice and who therefore come from the two major ethnic groups of Jews and Gentiles.

God has “called” (ἐκάλεσεν) them from out of both ethnic groups—the Jews and the Gentiles (οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν).

²⁵² ὡς καὶ ἐν τῷ Ὡσηὲ λέγει· καλέσω τὸν οὐ λαόν μου λαόν μου καὶ τὴν οὐκ ἠγαπημένην ἠγαπημένην – Paul now quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 where, like his previous argument from physical descendants to spiritual descendants based upon God’s purpose and choice, he will argue from a sub-group of Jews in comparison to the whole group of Jews to both this same sub-group of Jews in comparison to the whole group of Jews and to certain Gentiles in comparison to all Gentiles.

God declared in the 8th century B.C. that eventually He would take hard-hearted and unwilling Jews who are in turn rejected by Him and therefore not really “His people” and transform them into Jews who qualify to be true Jews by His loving them and changing them inwardly. This will ultimately be when God brings the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 into existence (see Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26 that speak of Jews to whom God gives a “heart of flesh” instead of a “heart of stone”). Thus, the story of the Jews is the story of God’s loyal love (*hesed*) towards them while enduring generation after generation of those who have rebelled against Him.

By extrapolation, it is also true that God takes clay pots from among the Gentiles, who are not even His ethnic chosen people and who begin their lives looking as though they will receive the judgment and wrath of God, so that He transforms them into clay pots who receive His mercy.

²⁵³ καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ οὗ ἐρρήθη αὐτοῖς· οὐ λαός μου ὑμεῖς, ἐκεῖ κληθήσονται υἱοὶ θεοῦ ζῶντος – Paul continues the quote from Hosea regarding future Jews who will be transformed by God into people who qualify for His mercy through their changed inwardness and authentic belief. Thus, God’s plan has always been to rescue from His condemnation some Jews, but not all Jews—just as Paul argued in Romans 9:6-13, that “not all who are from Israel are Israel.” Therefore, there is always a large group of Jews who potentially could be rescued from God’s wrath and eternal condemnation and a smaller sub-group, the “remnant,” who actually do get rescued. This was the case for OT Israel when God brought punishment on them for their disobedience and yet promised to change some of them in the future into true Jews of genuine belief.

By extrapolation, because Paul mentioned both Jews and Gentiles as receiving the “destiny of glory” from God and has already

said in Romans 2:11 that there is no discrimination or favoritism by God with respect to His granting eternal life, this is also the case for OT and NT Gentiles, who spiritually go from being people, who are not only outside the chosen ethnic people of Israel but also appear to be fully designed by God to incur His wrath and judgment, to being people, who are loved and forgiven by Him.

²⁵⁴ Ἡσαΐας δὲ κράζει ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ· ἐὰν ἦ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, τὸ ὑπόλειμμα σωθήσεται – Paul now quotes Isaiah 10:22,23 which describes God’s bringing about the millennial kingdom whereby the Jews after many generations will experience God’s salvation on the land of Israel.

Isaiah 10:20 says, “Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.”

The Jews will not rely on their enemies to whom they irrationally sometimes look for help, but on God, their God, who remains faithful to them. This will happen only completely when Jesus returns and restores the Kingdom of Israel, ruling over Jews who all have had their hearts changed by God. Therefore, there will be many physical “sons of Israel” who will exist long before only the **remnant** of these Jews will experience God’s salvation and the millennial kingdom after Jesus’ return.

And Isaiah 10:21 says, “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.”

But this is a return of their hearts to authentic belief in and worship of God. Again, the implication is that this happens according to God’s sovereign plans for the Jews which results in only a few of them, a remnant, in comparison to the relatively larger number of them, finding themselves possessors of the “great nation” and eternal life of the Abrahamic promises, starting with their participation in the millennial kingdom of Jesus or Revelation 20, when he physically returns and rules over the Jews (and the rest of the world) on the land of Israel with his capital at Jerusalem.

As quotes by Paul here in 9:27, Isaiah goes on in the next verse, **Isaiah 10:22** “For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant within them will return; a destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness (תְּלֵיפֹת צְדָקָה וְיִשְׁרָאֵל כִּי יִשְׁבֹּב בְּיָדֵינוּ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְבָרְכָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ) (καὶ ἐὰν γένηται ὁ λαὸς Ἰσραὴλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, τὸ κατάλειμμα αὐτῶν σωθήσεται λόγον γὰρ συντελῶν καὶ συντέμων ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ).”

God will destroy both the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah, but eventually a **remnant** will return to the land and to Him. Or, as the Septuagint says, “the remnant of them will be saved”—from God’s wrath and destruction, first when Israel becomes the most powerful nation in human history with all Jews as changed of heart believers and second when all believers enter into the eternal Kingdom of God.

And we can also infer from God’s treatment of the Jews that, just as most of them will experience God’s wrath at the final judgment, so all will most Gentiles who have lived throughout human history. It will be a relatively small group of Gentiles who will be changed inwardly by God and obtain life in the eternal Kingdom of God.

²⁵⁵ λόγον γὰρ συντελῶν καὶ συντέμων ποιήσει κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς – Paul’s quote of this part of Isaiah pertaining to the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel around 722 B.C. (and of the southern Kingdom of Judah around 600 B.C.) reveals that it will be “soon,” i.e., not way out in eternity, when God will bring about what He has planned, purposed and promised for the Jews on the land which He gives them according to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12-22. Therefore, they simply need to wait patiently for that which He will do, because He is the sovereign ruler and creator of all human history.

²⁵⁶ καὶ καθὼς προεῖρηκεν Ἡσαΐας· εἰ μὴ κύριος σαβαὼθ ἐγκατέλιπεν ἡμῖν σπέρμα, ὡς Σόδομα ἂν ἐγενήθημεν καὶ ὡς Γόμορρα ἂν ὁμοιωθῆμεν – Here Paul quotes Isaiah 1:9 where the prophet admits that God could easily have destroyed the entire Jewish kingdom of Judah for their rebellion against him in the 8th century B.C., just as God could have destroyed all the Jews at any time during their history (see Exodus 32). But, again, His sovereign choice was to keep the nation of Israel alive, even if it was not fully intact as a kingdom of true Jews with changed inwardness, and even on occasion they have been dispersed from the land. God has always had His Abrahamic promises in mind, that He will eventually completely fulfill them with respect to the Jews. Therefore, any dismantling of the Jewish people spiritually or physically only provides further evidence as to how far God is willing to go in judging and disciplining them before He eventually fulfills His promise and unifies them on the land of Israel with changed hearts and under the rule of their Messiah and Davidic king, who is Jesus of Nazareth.

The fulfillment of both His promises, however, will be on the basis of His own independent and personal choices, not on the basis of the Jews’ choices.

Other nations such as those of the Canaanites have come and gone. But somehow the Jews have stuck around in history and persevered through all attempts by Satan and his followers (e.g., Hitler) to destroy them. How has this happened? By God’s sovereign protection of them even though most of them have rejected Him as evidenced in the last 2,000 years by their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah.

Isaiah 1:9 Unless Yahweh of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah (καὶ εἰ μὴ κύριος σαβαὼθ ἐγκατέλιπεν ἡμῖν σπέρμα, ὡς Σόδομα ἂν ἐγενήθημεν καὶ ὡς Γόμορρα ἂν ὁμοιωθῆμεν).

The “seed” of Isaiah 1:9 is the same as the “remnant” of Isaiah 10:22,23—the sub-group of Jews who fulfill God’s requirement of their all having changed hearts and demonstrating authentic belief and obedience.

But, again, this is also in the light of God’s taking a sub-group of Gentiles, all of whom are not ethnically God’s chosen people, and turning them into changed of heart believers like their Jewish counterparts. Therefore, what God does with the remnant of Jews in comparison to the whole Jewish nation is what God does to a sub-group of Gentiles in comparison to both the Jews who

remain unbelievers and the Gentiles who remain unbelievers.

²⁵⁷ Τι οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὅτι ἔθνη τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην κατέλαβεν δικαιοσύνην, δικαιοσύνην δὲ τὴν ἐκ πίστεως – In light of how God has dealt with the Gentiles, as implied in what Paul has said to the Roman Gentile Christians in chapters 1-8, and how He has dealt with both the Jews and the Gentiles as described in Romans 9:1-29, Paul now states that the upshot of God’s sovereign design of both people groups as to their moral and heart condition during their lives and then their eternal destinies is that Gentiles have become acceptable to God without both their searching for this and without God’s having given them the Mosaic Covenant—when it has become clear to Paul that Jews naturally believe that the only path to justification before God is through obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

God made the Mosaic Covenant with the Jews as a follow-up to the Abrahamic Covenant, and they have made concerted efforts to become pleasing and acceptable to God through it, but here are Gentiles in Rome, who formerly knew very little if nothing about the Jewish God and the Mosaic Covenant, and look what has happened. They have become both bona fide followers of the Jewish Messiah Jesus and justified before God in contrast to most Jews, God’s chosen people as the ethnic group with whom He made the specific promise in Genesis 12:1-3 of their becoming a “great nation.”

Consequently, it is possible to conclude that God has predestined and intended Gentiles to be clay pots of mercy and has changed their inner subjectivity, causing them to believe in the Jesus, so that they have obtained *dikaioSunay*, justification, before God by virtue of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah (*apart from any knowledge of or obedience to the Mosaic Covenant*)—because somebody taught them in Rome about Jesus and they have become authentic believers, just as Paul, a Jew, is an authentic believer.

²⁵⁸ Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν – In contrast to the Gentiles who have become acceptable to God by their authentic belief, Paul says that Jews, members of the group of people who ought to be acceptable because God has chosen them to be the most important group of people in the world and has therefore paid so much attention to them, have worked hard to impress God and earn His acceptance through their obedience to the OT and specifically the Mosaic Covenant. However, they did not achieve justification, because they did not do what the Covenant actually requires (see Deuteronomy 10:16 below and chapter 30), which is a changed subjectivity and a circumcised heart that then leads to humble belief in God (and in Jesus as a result of his first appearance) and obedience to the Mosaic Covenant (see Leviticus 18:5 – “by which a man may live if he does them [God’s social and religious customs that He required of the Jews, His “statues” and “judgments”].”

In other words, the Jews seem to have taken God seriously and have made great efforts to do exactly what He has required in order to obtain His blessing of being a the “great nation” of the Abrahamic Covenant, but, unfortunately, their efforts have not matched what the Mosaic Covenant actually stated and required (as Paul will say in the next verse).

Deuteronomy 10:12 “Now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require from you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **13** and to keep Yahweh’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? **14** Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. **15** Yet on your fathers did Yahweh set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. **16** **So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.**”

Paul is saying that the Jews of his day are truly striving after the Mosaic Covenant that could bring them justification—if *they had changed hearts and exhibited authentic belief as underlying their obedience*. But did not “arrive” at what the Covenant requires— a changed heart and authentic belief. And God is holding them accountable for their lack of changed hearts—even though Paul has made it clear that only He can change them.

²⁵⁹ διὰ τί; ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐξ ἔργων προσέκοψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος – Here Paul states the case of the Jews explicitly. The Jews who have made effort human effort to please God and obtain His blessings of the “great nation” and eternal life have had the mentality that a person makes himself worthy of God’s acceptance, forgiveness, and blessings by his outward (outside his heart commitments which can be changed only by God) performance (“works” – ἐξ ἔργων) of God’s requirements in the Mosaic Covenant. This mentality is instead of one of “belief” (ἐκ πίστεως), which by definition begins from God’s grace and results in a person’s authentically believing God’s truth that he is a sinner who must repent, so that he receives justification only by God’s sovereign grace, thus never at any moment thinking that he is worthy of anything good from God. And consequently, the Jews, who have had the “earn” mentality, have stumbled and tripped right over God’s message in the OT to the effect that it is He and His grace that creates the proper qualification of belief/obedience in a sinful human being when He changes their hearts and which results in *dikaioSunay* and eternal mercy/life.

²⁶⁰ καθὼς γέγραπται ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκανδάλου, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ καταισχυνθήσεται – God declares in Isaiah 8 that He will be a stumbling block to the unbelieving Jews of both the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah. However, just as Paul says in Romans 5:5 that the genuine believer will not be ashamed of waiting confidently for immortality and moral perfection in the future Kingdom of God because He will certainly make sure the believer obtains them, God says in Isaiah 8 that those who do not trip over His grace and the depth of their sinfulness will likewise not become ashamed.

Paul is therefore saying that Jews have always stumbled over exactly what God is saying to them through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants—that it is He alone who can solve their problem of sin by working within them and in their hearts and minds,

with the result that they have made up their own false religion with God's statements and actions in the Bible.

While it is tempting to think that the stumbling stone is Jesus himself, in Isaiah 8 it is God as a metonymy, i.e., the combination of His grace and His causing people to grasp the depth of their sinfulness, both which indicate that a sinner can do nothing in and of himself to qualify for God's acceptance, approval, and mercy. The Jews have failed to grasp how sinful they really are and therefore how much they need for God to initiate in their hearts and cause them to perform authentic belief and obedience. Instead, the Jews have tried to make themselves worthy of God's blessing through their choices and efforts to obey the Mosaic Covenant.

The same is certainly true of "Christians," who use biblical words and language to create their own false Christianity and try to impress God with their works, even while claiming that they are Protestants who are justified by faith and grace alone. Modern sinners who claim to be Christians can fake Christianity just as easily as the Jews have attempted to fake authentic Judaism.

1 Peter 2:3 If you have tasted that the Lord is good, **2:4** to whom you are devoted, a living stone, that, on the one hand, has been deemed unworthy by men, but, on the other hand, is chosen and honorable (ἐντιμον) to God, **2:5** then you yourselves, as living stones, are being built as a spiritual house for the purpose of being a holy priesthood, in order to offer spiritual offerings that are acceptable to God in view of Jesus the Messiah, **2:6** because it is contained in the scripture, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone—a chosen and honorable (ἐντιμον) cornerstone, and the one who believes in it shall not be put to shame. <Isaiah 28:16>." **2:7** Therefore, the honor (τιμή) is for you who believe, but for the ones who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected, this became the cornerstone <Psalm 118:22>." **2:8** And "A stone of stumbling and a rock that was a trap <Isaiah 8:14>." They stumble because they disobey the message, to which also they were appointed.

²⁶¹ Ἀδελφοί, ἡ μὲν εὐδοκία τῆς ἐμῆς καρδίας καὶ ἡ δέησις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εἰς σωτηρίαν – Once again, like his lament at the beginning of chapter 9, Paul expresses his own heartfelt desire for his fellow Jews that they achieve God's salvation from their sin and His condemnation, even in line with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to make of his descendants a "great nation" and of course in line with His promise to bless with eternal life anyone who imitates the belief of Abraham.

²⁶² μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτοῖς ὅτι ζῆλον θεοῦ ἔχουσιν ἀλλ' οὐ κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν – Here Paul makes a revealing but chilling statement. The Jews can look as though they are wholeheartedly committed to obeying God ("they have a zeal for God"), but they are not. They are striving after obedience to the Mosaic Covenant with all their current human capability. Yet, they lack the "proper understanding," which must refer to the depth of their sinfulness and exact dynamic of God's grace that will also move them to recognize the truth of Jesus as the Messiah so as to embrace him with authentic belief.

This also could be true of modern "Christians," who pursue some form of Christian religion with all the possible human capability that sinners have, so that they, too, look as though they are the most committed, God-fearing people in existence, but they lack a proper grasp of the depth of their sin and exactly how the dynamic of God's grace operates in sinners. They read and teach the Bible, perhaps with some sort of traditional theology (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Pentecostal, etc.), but they do not comprehend correctly the biblical theology of sin and grace. Just because someone says that they are committed to God and demonstrate a high level of religious activity to prove it does not mean that they have a correct understanding of God and are exercising authentic belief.

Religion is very easy to learn and practice. Authentic Christianity requires the miraculous and inner work of the Spirit of God.

²⁶³ ἀγνοοῦντες γὰρ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην ζητοῦντες στήσαι τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑπετάγησαν – Thus, Paul concludes that the Jews' have taken the biblical message of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, which describes how to become acceptable by God, and distorted it, which means that they have made up their own religion using biblical terminology—which is altogether too easy for sinful human beings to do, whether Jews or Christians. They "do not really grasp" the way that "justification" (a standing before God that results in eternal forgiveness and obtaining participation in His fulfilling His promises of the nation of Israel and eternal life) comes from "God"—by grace operating within sinners and changing their subjectivity and Jesus' interceding on their behalf as a result of his death on the cross and resurrection afterwards. Instead, they "seek to establish" a way to become justified that they perform apart from God's grace. They "do not submit" to the method of God's justifying sinners in the same way that Adam and Eve did not submit to God's way of their living in the midst of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but choose their own way.

And thus God and His grace are their stumbling block (see 9:33). They have heard God, but they have not *really heard* God. His words are in their heads, but the truth of the ideas is not to the extent that they understand them correctly, believe them with changed hearts and authentic belief, and properly and humbly submit to God. They have come up with a different truth from the Bible itself with biblical words and some actual biblical ideas—such as the fact that Moses revealed the Mosaic Covenant to the Israelites or Jesus is the Messiah and Christ. They are not submitting to the way that God says in the Bible that He justifies and saves people.

This is why it is so important that we humbly think very carefully about our study of the Bible and constantly recheck our thinking about the Bible in order to get as close as possible to an accurate interpretation of the Bible. Other teachers of the Bible are helpful but certainly not authoritative. If we cannot argue our theology directly from the Bible, but only from the teaching and commentaries of theologians and Bible teachers, then we cannot say that we really embrace biblical theology.

²⁶⁴ τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι – Many English Bibles translate the first part of this verse as "Christ is the end of the law," as if the relevance of the Mosaic Covenant for the Jews (and Gentiles) comes to an end once Jesus

as the Messiah has appeared, so that he, with the New Covenant, replaces the Mosaic Covenant, resulting in the Jews' no longer needing to pay attention to it at all. In fact, it has become altogether wrong and immoral for the Jews to follow Moses. The only person they should follow is Jesus. Therefore, the Jews become just like the Gentiles as people of the New Covenant, who concern themselves with only Jesus and not with Moses and his covenant. This could (or also should) lead us to conclude that followers of Jesus, the "church" made up of both Jews and Gentiles (and obviously mainly Gentiles during the last 1900 years) become the new "Israel" and replace the Jews as the chosen people of God, allowing (even requiring) us to read the statements regarding the nation of Israel and the land of Israel in the OT prophets as now applying to the NT church, to heaven as the only place of the Kingdom of God, and to the eternal inheritance of the church (and not to the temporary inheritance of Israel on the land of Israel).

In contrast, the Complete Jewish Bible translates the first part of this verse as "For the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah," which I think makes more sense. While τέλος can refer to the end or conclusion of something, it can also refer to what someone hopes to achieve, which does not necessarily bring the end of it, but only the finish line with its still existing. Again, I think that Paul is indicating that God's purpose for (the finish line of) the Mosaic Covenant is to lead a person to authentic belief in the Messiah Jesus just as much as the apostolic message in the NT of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah is intended to do so. This is to say that a proper understanding of the Mosaic Covenant should teach a Jew that the goal of offering bulls and goats to God is to look for another, indeed, a human sacrifice to God that will become the eternal basis for God's forgiveness and mercy into eternity. The Jew should look at his animal sacrifices and automatically believe in Jesus as the crucified and sacrificed Messiah and his high priest now that he has made his first appearance in human history. Thus, the latter, belief in the Messiah, is now the touchstone of authentic biblical spirituality, so that if a Jew who is aggressively intent on following the Mosaic Covenant does not segue eventually and naturally (by the inner work of the Spirit of God) to belief in Jesus, then it reveals that he does not correctly understand the Mosaic Covenant and has made up his own "religion" centered in his human efforts using biblical terminology that comes from the Mosaic Covenant.

As Paul has already stated at the end of chapter two and now will go on to point out again, it is the Jew with a circumcised heart by God, who not only speaks of his belief in God and obedience to the covenant but also moves on to speak of his belief in Jesus the Messiah and his obedience to him, that is the true Jew. This also means that the requirement for sinners, Jews or Gentiles, in OT times or NT times, to acquire God's blessings of both participating in the "great nation" of Abraham's physical descendants and obtaining eternal life, has always been the same—a changed heart by God Himself and the resultant belief and obedience by someone who is still a sinner until God transforms all believers into eternal and morally perfect beings when Jesus returns or after death during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20.

Another way to say this is that every Jew is required by God to have a circumcised heart and to obey the Mosaic Covenant with authentic belief as the lead up to obeying Jesus with authentic belief now that he has arrived. In this way, each Jew continues to obey the Mosaic Covenant appropriately, while adding authentic obedience to Jesus, when he understands that the animal sacrifices that he continues to offer to God are intended to point to Jesus' sacrifice and intercession as high priest. The NT book of Hebrews explains this most explicitly.

²⁶⁵ Μωϋσῆς γὰρ γράφει τὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ τοῦ νόμου ὅτι ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς —

There are several options for what Paul means here—

1) If a Jew obeys the Mosaic Covenant perfectly, then he will acquire eternal life by having properly earned it. But this is impossible for any sinner to do, so that the authority over a Jew of the Mosaic Covenant ended when Jesus came on the scene and died for our sins.

2) If a Jew obeys the Mosaic Covenant by doing it with a changed heart and authentic belief, as the Covenant itself states in Deuteronomy 10:16 (and in chapter 30), then he will acquire eternal life the same way that a NT believer acquires it—through faith and belief and proper obedience to God.

Option #2 makes more sense. Paul is stating very succinctly how justification by means of the Mosaic Covenant can actually occur. It is by the same mechanism and methodology as that which it occurs by means of the New Covenant and Jesus—that someone "does the things" in the Mosaic Covenant with a changed heart and authentic belief as someone "does the things" of the New Covenant with the same kind of heart and belief. Paul is quoting Moses in Leviticus 18:5 to the effect that a proper obedience to (and therefore understanding of) the Mosaic Covenant leads a Jew to "do the things" of the covenant with appropriate obedience. And what things are these. Leviticus 18:5 labels them as "all the statutes and all the judgments" of the covenant, which is to say all 613 commandments which God lays out in the Mosaic Covenant from Exodus 19 through the last chapter of Deuteronomy.

Both God and Paul state with Leviticus 18:5 that a Jew "shall live" if he "does" the things of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, God's gift of life, even eternal life, comes to the Jew who properly obeys the Mosaic Covenant, which comes as a surprise to anyone who has thought that it is only doing what Jesus has instructed that allows a person, whether Jew or Gentile, to gain eternal salvation. But this is because the condition that God has placed on sinners to qualify for salvation and eternal life is the inner change of heart, which comes about by only the invisible work of the Spirit of God.

In other words, proper obedience to the Mosaic Covenant brings life in the same way that proper obedience to the gospel of Jesus brings it. And life includes God's acceptance, forgiveness, and blessings (including participation in the temporary "great nation" of the Jews) for all eternity. Therefore, God meant in Leviticus that escaping God's condemnation comes specifically from "practicing" God's statutes, but He was not requiring that the Jews become morally perfect in order to do so and achieve salvation and life. Instead, He was requiring that they become the kind of people who perform His commandments, even all 613

of them, with changed inwardness according to Deuteronomy 10:16 and chapter 30.

Leviticus 18:5 “So you shall keep My statutes (לְכָל־חֻמֹּתַי) (πάντα τὰ προστάγματα μου) and My judgments (לְכָל־דִּבְרֵי־חֻמֹּתַי) (καὶ πάντα τὰ κρίματά μου), by which a man may live (וְיָחִי־בָהֶם) (ὁ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς) if he does them; I am Yahweh.”

Deuteronomy 10:16 “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.”

Deuteronomy 30:6 “Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”

²⁶⁶ ἡ δὲ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη οὕτως λέγει· μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου· τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; τοῦτ' ἔστιν Χριστόν καταγαγεῖν —

Again, a couple of options for what Paul is saying here in vs. 6-11—

1) In contrast to the Mosaic Covenant’s requirement of moral perfection, the gospel of Jesus requires only belief in him as the Messiah.

2) In line with the Mosaic Covenant’s requirement of authentic belief and obedience to God where the heart and mind of a sinner recognizes that belief in the message of God and not striving with human effort to achieve something that cannot be achieved, such as pleasing God on our own apart from God’s grace (even doing something to trigger the Messiah’s appearing from heaven or being resurrected from the dead), the gospel of Jesus requires the same, but with taking the knowledge of Jesus that a person receives and embracing the truth of it with a heart, mind, and speech (and actions) that are characterized by authentic faith and obedience from having a changed inwardness.

And again, option #2 makes more sense. The Jews have been all about obeying the Mosaic Covenant adequately enough as an entire nation that it would motivate God to send the Messiah to rescue them from their enemies and restore the Kingdom of God on the land of Israel with a Davidic king ruling over them. And then, they would also rule the world with the Messiah.

Paul now shows in 10:6 & 7 what demonstrates their lack of understanding of the Mosaic Covenant through the two questions in Deuteronomy 30:12 & 13 that are really one question that any individual Jew might ask in regard to it.

The question is, “Is there anybody who has the ability to go to the extremes of the creation and bring back the key to my obeying the covenant properly?” In other words, what can a human being possibly do to obey God as much as He wants the Jews to obey Him in order to make sure He fulfills His promises to them and grants them completely safety and security on the land of Canaan/Israel? Then, Moses answers this question by stating the Covenant is not “too difficult” to obey, because the fact that the overall concept of it and the desire to obey it is in a Jew’s heart so that he can say, “I truly want to obey God and this covenant” makes the Jew appropriately obedient. Thus, it is a matter of the Jew’s heart (as the Covenant says in Deuteronomy 10:16 and chapter 30). No one has to do more than believe and obey from a changed heart.

Paul is saying that the same is true of the message of the Jesus as the Messiah. It is right there in a person’s mind and heart who has heard the good news of Jesus proclaimed to him. No one has to do more than believe this information and obey it—again, from a changed heart.

In this way, Paul exploits Moses’ point in Deuteronomy 30:11-14—that obedience to the Mosaic Covenant is a matter of a Jew’s heart that God has circumcised and says that it is the same for any one Jew and anyone else in regard to the Messiah. The tendency is for a Jew (or any sinful human being) to think that his religious performance (even Christian religious performance), that could include his ascending into heaven or crossing the ocean, i.e., going to some created extreme, to demonstrate how wonderfully committed to obeying God he is, is what pleases God and makes him worthy of His blessings and promises—including causing the Messiah to appear and save the Jews and restore a peaceful Kingdom of God on earth.

It is like those Jews who claim that when the entire nation of Israel, in a committed fashion, finally follows all 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant together, then the Messiah will come. They will cause God to send the Messiah down from heaven. In addition, they could cause him even to come up from the dead—so to speak. This is to say that the Jews think that God is waiting for them to obey Him as a nation, and then He will bring about the appearance of the Messiah to rescue them from their earthly enemies.

However, Paul is saying that the condition that God requires is much simpler than this. **It is a matter of God’s changing a sinful Jew’s heart and causing him to believe in Him and in the Messiah—all by His grace and the purpose of His choice, since every Jew (and every human being) is a clay pot on God’s potter’s wheel.** And this is something that the Jew can do even while he obeys the Mosaic Covenant. It has nothing to do with just his human obedience to the commandments of the covenant, but with the condition of his heart as a humble penitent before God through His grace.

Paul begins his reference to the OT by quoting the first part of Deuteronomy 9:4, a passage where Moses suggests that an individual Jew will think that God is giving him and the nation of Israel the land of Canaan because of how righteous they all are—again, that they deserve the land because of their marvelous obedience to God. Instead, Moses indicates that God takes the land from wicked and evil people and gives it to people who are equally sinful but who are also required to change their hearts and express authentic belief and obedience towards Him—which the Jews have failed to do so far in history, which is why they kept getting driven off the land until Jesus returns. The fact that many of the them are now back on the land is a precursor to their becoming the “great nation” of the Abrahamic Covenant at Jesus’ second appearance.

Deuteronomy 9:4 “Do not say in your heart (μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου) when Yahweh your God has driven them out before you, ‘Because of my righteousness Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land,’ but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh is dispossessing them before you.”

Deuteronomy 30:11 “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. **12** It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us (τίς ἀναβήσεται ἡμῖν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν) to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ **13** Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ **14** But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.”

In the first passage, Moses wants the Israelites to realize that each one’s righteous behavior before God is not making them worthy of the land which God is giving to them. Instead, the evil practices of its indigenous peoples, the Canaanites, has reached the point where God desires to do away with them and replace them with the Israelites, who, by inference, are sinful also and do not themselves deserve the land.

In the second passage, Moses is teaching the people of Israel to realize that obeying the Mosaic Covenant, all 613 of its commandments, is not impossible for sinful human beings like them. Instead, it is a matter of their hearts, of their changed hearts, that is most important and that will then lead to their demonstrating authentic belief in God and pursuing genuine obedience to Him under the covenant—so that they can acquire the fulfillment of God’s promises, including life.

²⁶⁷ ἢ τίς καταβήσεται εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον; τοῦτ’ ἔστιν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναγαγεῖν – Same idea as the previous verse.

The question, “Who will descend into the abyss?” is not in Deuteronomy 30:13 but is only similar to it, “**13** Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’” Therefore, Paul is referring to Jesus’ actual death. Yet, he wants it to be the same individual Jew who is asking what great religious act in obedience to God can he perform to earn Jesus’ being raised from the dead in order for him to complete his responsibility of rescuing him from his and Israel’s earthly enemies. But there is no such great religious act. Instead, God simply works within the hearts and minds of individual Jews according to the sovereign and predestined purpose of His grace, so that eventually an entire generation of Jews and the successive generations of Jews during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 become the recipients of the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham—along with individual Jews who became authentic believers down through history before Jesus’ return, who participate after being transformed into morally perfect human beings by God when Jesus returns.

²⁶⁸ ἀλλὰ τί λέγει; ἐγγύς σου τὸ ῥῆμά ἐστιν ἐν τῷ στόματί σου καὶ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως ὃ κηρύσσομεν – Just as Moses says in Deuteronomy 30 that no Israelite should fret about getting a hold of all 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant in order to have them at his fingertips so they that all are able to obey God as a whole nation in order to impress Him and make themselves worthy of His blessings and promises, neither should anyone fret about performing religious actions in order to give God the motivation (even earn God’s actions) to raise the Messiah from the dead and make him available to bring about salvation for the Jews and anyone else who believes in Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, Deuteronomy 30:14 states the way to please and obey God. It is to take the message of truth which God has provided and to have it in both one’s mouth and one’s heart, which is to say that God is concerned first with a sinful Jew’s inwardness and second with his outward performance of all the commandments in the Mosaic Covenant.

And Paul is saying the same thing about how a sinful Jew should respond to the information about Jesus as the Messiah. It is a matter of hearing and believing the truth of this “message” and information, not a matter of outwardly following the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, if a sinful Jew authentically believes the truth of the Mosaic Covenant, then he will also believe the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. This will allow him to have a “zeal for God” with good “understanding,” because he will be believing “the message of belief,” i.e., the message which calls for authentic, inward belief that comes from the work of the grace of God and not outward, religious performance that comes from the human being to make himself worthy of God’s blessings. Jesus has appeared historically as Jesus of Nazareth, and now it is simply a matter of believing the truth of him as God has revealed it. But the fundamental issue is the condition of one’s heart and thus having a heart of belief that is properly oriented towards God. There is no intricate, religious, and external key to gaining God’s acceptance through outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant (or to Christian religion as it has developed in various forms during the last two thousand years) that will then cause Him to send the Messiah in response to the Jews’ magnificent obedience to God and the covenant. There is only belief in the clear truth which God has exposed historically, particularly the truth of the person of Jesus as the Messiah, which results in the simplicity of repentance, belief, and obedience to morality from a humble position of God’s grace. And it does not result in building a religion and its external practices that impress God to the degree that He pays a person first with sending the Messiah and then with the Kingdom of God and eternal life—because he has somehow earned both.

Deuteronomy 30:14 “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it (ἔστιν σου ἐγγύς τὸ ῥῆμα σφόδρα ἐν τῷ στόματί σου καὶ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ταῖς χερσίν σου αὐτὸ ποιεῖν).”

²⁶⁹ ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ – Again, Paul states the obvious—that following the Mosaic Covenant in order to earn God’s forgiveness is not the correct method to gain God’s acceptance and blessings, but simply taking the clear information of history (and now the apostolic message that leads to believing in Jesus as one’s Master and Messiah) is what rescues any individual, sinful Jew (and Gentile) from God’s eternal condemnation so that he obtains the promises of Abraham and eternal life. Nevertheless, the assumption is that this happens because of the circumcision of the heart by God that Paul mentioned at the end of chapter 2. Here, Paul puts it in terms of confessing “in [one]s mouth the Lord Jesus” and believing “because of [one]’s heart that God raised him from the dead.” The first is to internalize intellectually the role of Jesus as Messiah, Master, and Savior. The second is to

internalize because of a changed heart the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection were both vital to his fulfilling his role as Messiah, Master, and Savior.

This is obviously radically different from the traditional understanding of the Messiah from the Jews' study of the OT where they believed that he would promote the Mosaic Covenant as the center of any Jew's relationship with God and also destroy Israel's earthly enemies. That the final (? – or restoration of the line of the) Jewish king(s) would be executed by the Jewish leadership and then rise from the dead in order to be the only fully effective propitiatory offering to God was certainly not on their intellectual radar.

As I said, implied is that verbal confession and heart belief require a circumcised and changed heart just as Moses points out in Deuteronomy 10 & 30 that proper obedience to the Mosaic Covenant require them too. Implied also is that Jesus and not the Mosaic Covenant is the basis of obtaining God's promises of the "great nation" of Israel and eternal salvation—because of his death and resurrection as a propitiatory offering to God. The Jews most likely believed that the Messiah would promote obedience to the Mosaic Covenant as the basis of obtaining all God's blessings, whether the blessing is being a part of the great nation of Israel or acquiring eternal life with Abraham. But Jesus demonstrated by his death and resurrection that he is the only basis for both promises.

²⁷⁰ καρδιά γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογείται εἰς σωτηρίαν – Here Paul promotes the core idea of the biblical message, that it is at the level of a person's heart commitments that the proper condition for receiving the fulfillment of God's promises of the "great nation" of Israel and eternal salvation occurs. And of course Paul has also already made it clear that it is God alone who ultimately brings this about (see Romans 2:28,29 and Romans 9 through His "purpose according to choice"), just as Moses pointed out the same thing to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30:1-6, especially v. 6, "Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your existence, so that you may live." In addition, to embrace Jesus correctly is to take into account not just his life, but also his death and resurrection by which he qualified to become our king and high priest (see Romans 1:4).

Paul is not making a large distinction between justification and salvation, because certainly to have one is to have the other. To acquire a standing before God that will lead to eternal salvation is to have the guarantee through God's grace and faithfulness that He will certainly grant salvation to this person. And to believe the truth in one's heart is to be able to speak the truth from a position of authentic belief with one's mouth. A person can hardly do one without also doing the other—genuinely!! In other words, biblical inwardness theologically leads to both justification and salvation.

²⁷¹ λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ κατασχυνθήσεται – Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16 where God told both the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah around 722 B.C. that the Davidic Covenant, which they were not trusting in, will nevertheless become the cornerstone of the building comprised of His people, the authentically believing Jews. Thus, the Davidic Covenant is the "it" in this passage. Isaiah 28 is also referring to the fact that the Israelites had made a covenant with foreign empires to protect them from harm. However, God around 1,000 B.C. had already made and will continue to make and keep the Davidic Covenant with the nation of Israel, which is all that they need for protection from their enemies. Therefore, by adding the word πᾶς at the beginning of the Isaiah 28:16 quote, Paul is alluding to the fact that both his Jewish readers *and the Gentiles* must simply be the kind of people who believe God *with their changed hearts* for His promises, which means believing in even the Davidic Covenant and the final, Jewish Davidic king, Jesus of Nazareth. This is what Paul goes on to argue. Anyone who demonstrates belief of this kind will certainly not be embarrassed or ashamed when the outcome is God's eternal mercy and life—regardless of how long someone has to wait for these to appear. Thus, the Davidic Covenant of Isaiah 28:16 becomes a metonymy for Jesus, the final king of this covenant, once he appears, so that the "it" here implies the "him" of Jesus.

[Isaiah 28:16](#) Therefore thus says Adonai Yahweh, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed (ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ κατασχυνθῆ)."

²⁷² οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν διαστολή Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἑλλήνου, ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων, πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν – In the previous verse, Paul quoted Isaiah 28:16 to the effect that the Jew who genuinely believes in the Davidic Covenant will not be ashamed of doing so because it will theologically lead to participating in God's promises. But he also added the word πᾶς at the beginning. Now he explains the full significance of this word "everyone," that it includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul now says explicitly that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" in God's eyes. God has chosen the Jews as a unique ethnic group to play a special role in human history, but this does not mean that they have a higher status as far as God's choosing sinners to obtain His salvation and eternal life. And this is because God is "Lord of all," i.e., of all believers regardless of their ethnic group. And this is because God richly provides His grace, mediation, and salvation "towards all who call upon Him," i.e., towards all, who with changed hearts, appeal to God for mercy and life through Jesus as their "Lord" and risen from the dead propitiatory offering.

The inference from all that Paul has been arguing is that both Jews and Gentiles obtain an acceptable standing before God by means of their doing the same thing—believing (from a heart that has been changed by the grace of God). It is not that the Jew can point to his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, and it is not that the Gentile can do this either (which would be a possible conclusion from reading the OT), but it is that both can point to what God has done to their subjectivity and changed it so as to orient them towards God, His truth, and Jesus at the level of the commitments of their hearts. If both Jews and Gentiles

demonstrate this through humility, repentance, moral pursuit, and perseverance of these in the midst of and after suffering the normal afflictions of this life, either from their own sin or through persecution and life as it presents itself to all human beings, then they present clear evidence for the authenticity of their belief. In this way, God also demonstrates that He is God of both Jews and Gentiles, even though He has chosen the Jews for a special and unique purpose within human history as Paul has been pointing out throughout Romans.

²⁷³ πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται – Paul now quotes Joel 2:32 which is speaking of the Jews at the end of history when God brings about their final judgment and discipline before making them the “great nation” of the Abrahamic Covenant. Indeed, “everyone [of the Jews] who will call upon” God for salvation from His judgment and destruction will obtain His saving them. But this is the point, if calling out to God with genuine inwardness and belief results in salvation from God, then the fact that it is good enough for the Jews means that it is good enough for the Gentiles. Thus, the Jews become an object lesson for the Gentiles. God will bring about earthly judgment of the Jews (as He has before) and yet saves some of them from both it and His eternal judgment and destruction. Gentiles should take note and also appeal to God in the same way for their eternal salvation.

Joel 2:32 “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of Yahweh will be delivered (καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται); for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as Yahweh has said, even among the survivors whom Yahweh calls.”

²⁷⁴ Πῶς οὖν ἐπικαλέσονται εἰς ὃν οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν; πῶς δὲ πιστεύσωσιν οὐ οὐκ ἤκουσαν; πῶς δὲ ἀκούσωσιν χωρὶς κηρύσσοντος – The important question in Paul’s mind from the beginning of chapter 9 has been, “Why is it that some many Jews have not become believers in God and in Jesus as their Messiah while the clear indication is that many more Gentiles have done so?” Implied is the question, “Has God rejected the Jews, because they have done so much to disobey Him?” First, Paul stated that, by God’s design, not “all those who are from Israel,” i.e., descendants of Jacob, are the true “Israel” as people of authentic belief.

Second, it depends upon whom God. He “has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”

Third, God is the potter, while the Jews (and Gentiles) are clay pots on His potter’s wheel, and He determines their lives—with some Jews becoming authentic believers and most of them not doing so.

Fourth, the Jews have striven to please God by their own self-created religious actions, which are not sufficient to earn God’s blessings, while the clear goal of the Mosaic Covenant is that the Jews embrace Jesus as their ultimate offering and sacrifice to God, so that declaring Jesus as the Messiah from a repentant heart is necessary for any sinful human being.

Fifth, God has sent prophet after prophet to the nation of Israel to proclaim His truth about the Messiah as described in the OT, so that they may hear this messianic message and believe it. And this has included the more recent “prophets” of Jesus, his apostles, so that the Gentiles have believed while so many Jews have not. But the Jews have remained a “disobedient and obstinate people” (see v. 21).

Then, in 11:1, Paul will once again ask if God has rejected His people, the Jews and use himself as an example of the answer, which is an unequivocal, No!!

Here, in vs. 14 and 15, Paul wants to highlight and make explicit the process by which people, both Jews and Gentiles (but especially Jews), become believers. The process is initiated and controlled by God for His own purposes, which Paul is describing as involving both Jews and Gentiles in the midst of the former being a unique ethnic group with the special role of communicating God’s truth to the whole world in human history.

Yet, it is clear that God’s purposes do not exclude the Gentiles, when it comes to sinners’ acquiring the fulfillment of His promises, while His purposes also do not incorporate the entirety of the Jewish people. God’s process for causing sinners to “call on Him” is to send “those who proclaim good news of good things” so that people may “hear” the good news and then “believe” the good news and then “call on” God for His mercy and salvation.

To repeat, it starts with God and ends with God—because Paul has already argued that it is His “gracious choice” of specific sinners, both Jews and Gentiles, who embrace the good news and obtain mercy and salvation (see Romans 8:28-30,33; 9:11; 11:5-6). Human beings are not ultimately in control of this process. God is.

²⁷⁵ πῶς δὲ κηρύξωσιν ἐὰν μὴ ἀποσταλώσιν; καθὼς γέγραπται ὡς ὠραῖοι οἱ πόδες τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων τὰ ἀγαθὰ –

In Isaiah 52 around 740 B.C., God announces through this prophet the good news of the restoration of the Jews to their land and to an experience of wealth and prosperity, which is what He promised to them in the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3 to become a “great nation.” Thus, the “good news” of Isaiah 52:7 is the status of the Jews of ultimately the millennial kingdom of Revelation 21 when Jesus returns, destroys Israel’s earthly enemies, and sets up the first stage of the Kingdom of God on the land of Israel. God also predicts and guarantees that He will announce this good news of the “great nation” of Israel through human beings, and He is saying this to and in regard to the Israelites/Jews.

In addition, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 as something which was originally spoken to the Jews only, but has significance for the Gentiles, too, i.e., the Gentiles whom God has graciously chosen to announce the “good news” of Jesus as the Messiah through whom they acquire eternal mercy and salvation from God.

Isaiah 52:7 How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness (ὡς ὠρα ἐπὶ τῶν ὄρεων, ὡς πόδες εὐαγγελιζομένου ἀκοὴν εἰρήνης, ὡς εὐαγγελιζόμενος ἀγαθὰ), who announces

salvation, and says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

²⁷⁶ Ἄλλ’ οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ. Ἡσαΐας γὰρ λέγει κύριε, τίς ἐπίστευσεν τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν – Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1 as to who has believed “our message,” when Isaiah 52 speaks of the fact that “many nations... will understand” the role and message of God’s “servant” whose “appearance” becomes “marred more than any man.” It makes the most sense that this “servant” is Jesus as the beaten and crucified Messiah, who fulfills his role as Savior for the Jews and the Gentiles, leading to “our message” in 53:1 referring to the information that all the Gentiles and Jews embrace, namely Jesus as their king and savior.

Therefore, in line with 10:12, when Paul says at the beginning of this verse in Romans, “However, not everyone obeyed the good news,” he means that not all of humanity, who have heard something about God, have been willing to embrace what God has presented as the wonderful good news for sinful people, especially the information about Jesus as the Messiah.

Paul stated at the beginning of chapter 9 that not all from Israel are Israel, that not every Jew as a descendant of Jacob ends up becoming a member of “Israel” as defined by those Jews who become authentic believers in God and who receive the fulfillment of God’s promises. Here, he quotes Isaiah 53:1 that says the same thing in question form, “Lord, who believed our report?” But now Paul is referring to both Jews and Gentiles, using the question from Isaiah to say that some Jews have believed and some Gentiles have also, but most of humanity have not.

Paul continues to teach in these three chapters of 9-11 that God is control of the process of people becoming believers (vs. 14,15) and He is in control of who becomes believers (by His gracious choice), resulting in the conclusion that God’s plans simply do not include everyone in the nation of Israel and everyone in the Gentile world believing His message. And Paul quotes the question of Isaiah 53:1 where the “our” refers to Jews and Gentiles to show this.

²⁷⁷ ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀκοῆ διὰ ρήματος Χριστοῦ – Thus, Paul states explicitly that the dynamic in existence in his day is that authentic belief in God entails hearing the good news of the Messiah, from which I think we can infer that he is saying this vital information about the Messiah exists in the Old Testament and has now been revealed in the very person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Messiah is at the center of the entire biblical documents, from Genesis through Revelation, so that authentic belief in God involves and includes belief in the Messiah—however much someone has learned about him at any time in human history, whether very little if we are talking about Adam and Eve, or very much for us now that the Messiah has made his first appearance and we have the whole New Testament to study and absorb.

Thus, belief for a sinner is to some degree belief in the biblical Messiah. Isaiah 52 and 53 are all about him, too. But this is what the Jews are missing, because they are so focused (incorrectly) on Moses and the Mosaic Covenant. They need to move on to the Davidic and New Covenants and camp on them and understand them fully (!)—with Jesus’ claims in the gospel accounts to be the Messiah as absolutely true.

²⁷⁸ ἀλλὰ λέγω, μὴ οὐκ ἤκουσαν; μενοῦνγε εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ρήματα αὐτῶν – Can it be said that the Gentiles and OT Israelites did not hear the message of the Messiah or enough about the Messiah, thus basically making it impossible for them to have proper belief? In other words, since God is in control of both the process of proclaiming the message and people’s believing the message, is it possible that God has intentionally kept the message from people so that they will not be able to believe it?

Thus, it makes sense that Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 to say that, while the OT message was not always about the Messiah *per se*, the Israelites/Jews and Gentiles in the past have certainly had enough information about God to engage in proper belief. And, remarkably enough, the information came from the creation which speaks loudly and clearly in regard to the Creator (see Romans 1)—which is enough to convince a person that he needs to believe in God and thereby fulfill the condition He has placed on sinners in order for them to obtain eternal life and salvation.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God, and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

19:4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world (εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ρήματα αὐτῶν). In them He has placed a tent for the sun.

²⁷⁹ ἀλλὰ λέγω, μὴ Ἰσραὴλ οὐκ ἔγνω; πρῶτος Μωϋσῆς λέγει ἐγὼ παραζηλώσω ὑμᾶς ἐπ’ οὐκ ἔθνει, ἐπ’ ἔθνει ἀσυνέτω παροργιῶ ὑμᾶς – What is Paul asking in regard to what “Israel did not know?” I think in the context it has to be how history was going to proceed for both the OT Jews and the Gentiles towards the appearance and activity of the Messiah—especially if the Jews refused to believe God and the truth which He was conveying to them.

Should the Jews have been aware of what God was going to do with them and with the Gentiles in relation to the Jews’ Messiah? The answer is, “Yes.” Going all the way back to Moses around 1500 B.C., he was the first one to say explicitly that God would annoy the Jews and make them angry by means of an ethnic group, a nation outside the nation of Israel, which is to say the Gentiles in total, when they believe a message from God that those who are proclaiming it claim it to be from the God of Israel—a message that is clearly not the same one that the Jews themselves are embracing and claiming to be from God. In other words, the Jews will believe that the OT is saying X (the wrong understanding of the OT), while others (even some Jews) are claiming that the OT says Y (the correct understanding of the OT). And this is going to be so annoying to the Jews that they believe they

are completely in the right to squash the new message and even kill those who are proclaiming it.

I think, therefore, that both the Hebrew נָאֵץ and the Greek παραζηλώω do not mean “make jealous” as we think of jealousy, that someone has something that I really want, and I am jealous of their having it when it is not possible for me to get it. Therefore, these words mean the same thing as אַעֲבֹב and παροργίζω, to make someone angry simply because you are doing the wrong thing according to them, and this is really annoying to them.

In Deuteronomy 32:21, Moses is saying that the Israelites are really going to annoy God and make Him angry with their worship of false gods, with the result that God is very much going to annoy them and make them angry when the Gentiles believe the truth, which the Jews think is a lie and a distortion of the biblical message which they have learned and to which they are assiduously and painstakingly adhering. We know that this is what happens when Paul starts proclaiming the message of Jesus as the Messiah and the Gentiles believe it and obey it. The book of Acts and Paul’s letters indicate that the Jews get so upset at the apostles and Paul for teaching what they think is a false Messiah that their anger leads them to try to squash their message and even kill the people who are both proclaiming it and believing it. This means that they are not jealous per se, wanting what the Gentiles have when they cannot have it. Instead, they are angrily zealous for what they believe is the truth and attempt to eliminate the “false” message of the apostles and Paul and to eliminate those who are promoting this “false” message and sometimes those who believe it (the Gentiles!). The Jews have to be thinking, “How can the Gentiles be believing the truth of the Bible, when we have the truth in the Mosaic Covenant?”

This means also that there was plenty of good information in OT times provided to the Jews (for example, the Mosaic Covenant and the whole OT Torah), but they still refused to believe the truth properly with genuine belief—because their hearts were so hard and they lacked changed hearts and good understanding. And there was information enough in the OT to instruct the Jews in what God’s plans and purposes were and are in regard to the Jews and the Gentiles. For example, and even “first,” God through Moses said in Deuteronomy 32:31 that He would anger them as they angered Him to try to get them to think about what they are believing—that it is not in line with the Bible, so that eventually they will believe the truth all as a part of His plan for the Jews and the Gentiles, which Paul will explain more clearly in chapter 11. The clear implication of God’s promises to Abraham is that the Gentiles will believe the message of Jesus as the Messiah that will lead eventually to the Jews believing this message as a whole group—on the land of Israel in the millennial kingdom under the rule of Jesus as their Messiah.

Deuteronomy 32:21 ‘They have made Me jealous [annoyed and angry] (נָאֵץ אֱלֹהִים) (αὐτοὶ παρεζήλωσάν με) with what is not God; they have provoked Me to anger (אֲבֹב) (παρώρισάν με) with their idols. So I will make them jealous [annoyed and angry] (אֲבֹב אֶתְכֶם) (κάγω παραζηλώσω αὐτούς) with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger (אֲבֹב אֶתְכֶם) (παροργιῶ αὐτούς) with a foolish nation.’

²⁸⁰ Ἡσαΐας δὲ ἀποτολμᾷ καὶ λέγει εὐρέθην ἐν τοῖς ἐμὲ μὴ ζητοῦσιν, ἐμφανῆς ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἐμὲ μὴ ἐπερωτῶσιν – In order to interpret the last two verses of chapter ten, I need to consider the options for understanding Isaiah 65:1-2, which Paul quotes in these verses, and the options for understanding Romans 10:20-21. Isaiah 65:1-2 read—

Isaiah 65:1 “I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me (Ἐμφανῆς ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἐμὲ μὴ ζητοῦσιν); I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me (εὐρέθην τοῖς ἐμὲ μὴ ἐπερωτῶσιν). I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ to a nation which did not call on My name.” **65:2** I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people (ἐξέπετασα τὰς χεῖράς μου ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν πρὸς λαὸν ἀπειθοῦντα καὶ ἀντιλέγοντα), who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts.”

The options are—

1) God is referring in v. 1 to the Gentiles, who, in their pagan idolatry, were not even seeking after God; and then, all of a sudden, they found Him—like the Gentiles to whom Paul proclaimed the message of Jesus in places such as Ephesus and Corinth, while v. 2 is referring to the Jews, who remained stubborn in their hard-heartedness—like the Jews in various places Paul visited and encountered great resistance to Jesus as the Messiah from the Jews.

2) God is referring in both v. 1 and v. 2 to the Jews, who eventually found God after their period of time of hard-heartedness. Then, there are two options for understanding Romans 10:20-21—

1) V. 20 refers to the Gentiles as explained above (even though Paul mixes the Greek words of the Septuagint of Isaiah 65:1), while v. 21 refers to the Jews as explained above. This would then be exactly in line with option #1 for the two Isaiah verses OR as an argument from the Jews to the Gentiles in v. 20 and an argument from the Jews to the Jews in v. 21.

2) Both v. 20 and v. 21 refer to the Jews as in line with option #2 above for the two Isaiah verses.

I think that option #1 for both Isaiah 65:1-2 and Romans 10:20-21 makes the most sense, given the language in the two passages. For example, Paul says in v. 21, “Yet, to Israel He says...” referring to God’s statement in Isaiah 65:2, indicating more clearly that v. 20 is not an argument from the Jews to the Gentiles from Isaiah 65:1. And it makes sense that God would say of the Gentiles that they were not asking for Him, but He “permitted” (even caused!) them to seek and find Him—through some appropriate means, such as the apostle Paul’s announcing Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. In addition, Isaiah 65:2 surely sounds like an indictment of the Jews in Isaiah’s day and Jesus’ and Paul’s day—in contrast to what Paul was seeing among the Gentiles in places like Pisidian Antioch (see Acts 13), Ephesus (see Acts 18 & 19), and Corinth (see Acts 18).

Therefore, the boldness of Isaiah in 65:1 is that God boldly declares that Gentiles are going to receive the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham—through their belief in the truth about Him as implied and argued by Paul throughout his letter to the Roman Gentile Christians.

²⁸¹ πρὸς δὲ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ λέγει ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ἐξεπέτασα τὰς χεῖράς μου πρὸς λαὸν ἀπειθοῦντα καὶ ἀντιλέγοντα – Then Paul refers to the Jews here in v. 21, that they have remained stubbornly disobedient in their refusal to believe God properly—just as Isaiah 65:2 predicted.

Thus, Paul ends chapter 10 where he began in 9:30ff., that God has brought about authentic belief among the Gentiles as He planned, while the Jews have remained stubbornly unbelieving as He planned, which fills out the picture of God’s right and prerogative to make certain people clay pots of mercy and other people clay pots of wrath.

Yet, Paul will continue in chapter 11 to state categorically that God has not rejected the Jews and is not finished with them—and His fulfilling His promise to Abraham to make his physical descendants the most powerful nation in all human history. Indeed, he will say that the Gentiles join the Jews in God’s promises to Abraham and not the other way around.

²⁸² Λέγω οὖν, μὴ ἀπόσωτο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ; μὴ γένοιτο· καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ Ἰσραηλίτης εἰμί, ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ, φυλῆς Βενιαμὴν – Paul has argued in chapter 9 that God has changed the hearts of Gentiles who have become believers in Him and His truth, while the Jews have remained stubborn and obstinate in their hearts, thinking that they can become justified by making themselves worthy of it through their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Now he asks a very important question, “Has God abandoned the Jews (and the promises He made to them in the Abrahamic Covenant) with His fulfilling His plans for Gentiles to become believers in the Jewish Messiah in light of the Jews having rejected their Messiah?” This would seem to make sense on one level, that after all the times that God has disciplined the nation of Israel in OT times and urged them to return to Him and obey Him with circumcised hearts, the final straw could have been their rejecting Jesus and even executing him on the cross. Couldn’t we see God finally reaching the end of His patience and declaring that He was done with the Jews and was now moving on to the Gentiles who, by predominantly become the “church” of the New Testament, also became His new chosen people to whom He would now fulfill the promises that He made to Abraham? The Gentiles will now inherit the “land” of Genesis 12 & 15, i.e., the land of heaven, and they will become the “great nation” of the people of the Kingdom of God of heaven.

But Paul’s answer to his question is another unequivocal “No!” And his first example of why it is true that God has not rejected the Jews is himself! Paul is a Jew, and look what God has done to him. He has made him a believer in Jesus the Messiah. While we might think that one Jewish believer in the Jewish Messiah is no big deal, especially while there have been so many Gentiles who have become believers, I think that Paul is saying that his own changed heart, conversion, and belief in Jesus among all the Jews is actually clear evidence that God is still in the process of fulfilling His promises to them, so that He really will restore the Kingdom of Israel on the land of Israel (as Jesus’ apostles asked in Acts 1).

Thus, Paul provides his Jewish credentials as a descendant of Abraham, but he must mean through Isaac and Jacob. And he refers to this latter person who is the grandson of Abraham by saying that he is a member of the tribe of Benjamin, Jacob’s youngest son.

By the way, this is in line with what Paul argued at the beginning of chapter 9, that not all those who are from Jacob are truly Israel, i.e., Jews who have changed hearts. Indeed, Paul is certainly one of those who is both—a descendant of Jacob through his youngest son, Benjamin, and a changed of heart believer in Jesus the Messiah (indeed, the sole apostle of Jesus to the Gentiles!). Other uses of ἀποθέω (=push away, reject, repudiate)—

[Acts 7:27](#) “But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’”

[Acts 7:39](#) “Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,

[Acts 13:46](#) Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

[1 Timothy 1:19](#) keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

²⁸³ οὐκ ἀπόσωτο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ὃν πρόεγνων. ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ἐν Ἠλίᾳ τί λέγει ἡ γραφή, ὡς ἐντυγχάνει τῷ θεῷ κατὰ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ – Thus, Paul can state that Jews have become believers whom God previously planned for them to become such, which, again, implies what he said in 9:6, that as for “all those who are from Israel [Jacob], these are not Israel [believing Jews who will participate in the restored Kingdom of Israel—as described in Revelation 20]. This is to say that God knew ahead a time which Jews He would change inwardly, i.e., who would be clay pots of mercy, even among the Jews, because it is also true that not all Jews are true Jews.

And Paul quotes a portion of Psalm 94:14, where God says that He will judge and destroy the Gentiles who speak ill of His chosen people, the Jews, and who even seek to hurt and harm them by killing widows and orphans. Indeed, He “will not abandon His people,” the Jews, and “He will not forsake” them, His “inheritance.” The Jews have been and continue to be the chosen people of God, God’s earthly inheritance, with their special role to receive and communicate the truthful information about a Him by means of the Bible and to bring forth the Messiah as a descendant of both Judah and David, even if it is true that only some of Jews become authentic believers in God when He changes their hearts.

[Psalm 94:14](#) For Yahweh will not abandon His people (ὅτι οὐκ ἀπόσεται κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ), nor will He forsake His inheritance.

And Paul goes on in this verse to cite Elijah’s experience as another example of God’s control of which Jews become acceptable to Him in the midst of other Jews who have rejected Him.

²⁸⁴ κύριε, τοὺς προφῆτας σου ἀπέκτειναν, τὰ θυσιαστήριά σου κατέσκαψαν, καὶ γὰρ ὑπελείφθην μόνος καὶ ζητοῦσιν τὴν ψυχὴν μου – Paul quotes Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10,14 when he laments that he firmly believes that all the Jews around him are in

full rebellion against God, thus seeking even to kill him. Elijah has recently killed the prophets of Baal and Jezebel, Ahab's wife, swears that she will kill him, so that he flees all the way to Mt. Horeb. An angel asks him what he is doing there, and he responds in the two verses of 1 Kings.

[1 Kings 19:10 and 14](#) He said, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away (ἃ θυσιαστήρια σου κατέσκαψαν καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας σου ἀπέκτειναν ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ, καὶ ὑπολέλειμμαί ἐγὼ μόνωτατος, καὶ ζητοῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν μου λαβεῖν αὐτήν)."

The situation looks bleak for Elijah, much the way it does to Paul—to the extent that he said at the beginning of chapter 9 that he would be willing to be assigned to destruction in place of all the Jews who currently were rejecting their own Messiah, even though many of them want him dead anyway!!

²⁸⁵ ἀλλὰ τί λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ χρηματισμός; κατέλιπον ἑμαυτῷ ἑπτακισχιλίους ἄνδρας, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔκαμψαν γόνυ τῇ Βάαλ – Paul asks, "What is the divine response" to the desperate Elijah? That he is wrong in his assessment of the spiritual condition of Israel. It may look as though every other Jew besides him is an abject rebel against God and out to kill him. But the truth is, as Paul paraphrases 1 Kings 19:18, that God has sovereignly caused 7,000 Jews (or so, assuming this is not a completely accurate number) to be changed of heart authentic believers, even if Elijah cannot readily see them.

Again, it is God who is in control of this, so that He is working among the Jews even if others do not clearly see this. Therefore, at a time when it appeared as though God had abandoned the Jews, He had not, implying of course that He never will.

[1 Kings 19:18](#) "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him (καὶ καταλείψεις ἐν Ἰσραὴλ ἑπτὰ χιλιάδας ἀνδρῶν, πάντα γόνατα, ἃ οὐκ ὠκλασαν γόνυ τῷ Βααλ)."

Therefore, the bleak situation for Elijah is the bleak situation for the Jews of Paul's day, that God always has a small number of them who are genuine in their belief. And I think that this is in the midst of His leading history towards His fulfilling His promise to Abraham to make his descendants, the Jews, the most powerful nation in human history when Jesus returns—as Paul goes on to imply.

²⁸⁶ οὕτως οὖν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ λείμμα κατ' ἐκλογὴν χάριτος γέγονεν – Indeed, Paul now draws the natural and rational conclusion from God's statement to Elijah in the 9th century B.C. that in his own day God has established a small group of Jews, a "remnant" (λείμμα), as genuine believers, even believers in Jesus the Messiah (of which Paul is one). And this work of God is according to His own independent decision and choice to express His grace and mercy to undeserving sinful human beings—in this case, to Jews as He moves towards the end of the present age when Jesus will make his grand entrance at his return and establish the Kingdom of God on earth with a core group of believing Jews on the land of Israel who make up the first generation of Jews during the millennial kingdom.

This is why I translate οὕτως with "In the same manner," which is to say, as God did in the 9th century B.C., so is He also doing in the 1st century A.D.—and by inference, so has He always done and will continue to do right up through the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord and Jesus' return.

Again, God has not abandoned the Jews as His chosen people, for "not all those from Jacob" are "Israel." Only a portion of them are believing "Israel," because nothing obligated God to change the hearts of all the Jews down through history.

This is the only use of λείμμα in the NT.

But here are verses from the OT regarding the "remnant" of Israel—

[Isaiah 10:20](#) Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

[Isaiah 10:21](#) A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

[Isaiah 10:22](#) For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, Only a remnant within them will return; a destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.

[Isaiah 11:11](#) Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

[Isaiah 11:16](#) And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.

[Isaiah 28:5](#) In that day Yahweh of hosts will become a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people;

²⁸⁷ εἰ δὲ χάριτι, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἔργων, ἐπεὶ ἡ χάρις οὐκέτι γίνεται χάρις – Paul more fully explains that the current Jews' being authentic believers has had nothing to do with their outward actions (even "works" of obedience to the Mosaic Covenant) whereby they have made themselves worthy of God's acceptance and mercy. In other words, grace is the very antithesis of earning and motivating God to act on one's behalf through moral or obedient actions. God's activity of grace is based on His independent choice as the transcendent storyteller and not on anything that His creatures do to impress Him and cause Him to respond to them in a loving and merciful manner.

Therefore, God chooses to change the hearts of certain sinful human beings, including within the special ethnic group of His chosen people, the Jews. And thus by His sovereign and independent grace, not on the basis of their religious or obedient actions, He inwardly changes them and they exhibit authentic belief and obedience, with the result that they obtain His eternal mercy and salvation.

²⁸⁸ Τί οὖν; ὁ ἐπιζητεῖ Ἰσραήλ, τοῦτο οὐκ ἐπέτυχεν, ἡ δὲ ἐκλογή ἐπέτυχεν· οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ ἐπωρόθησαν – What are the Jews seeking that they did and do “not obtain?” A standing before God of being acceptable and the blessing of Abraham, starting with their becoming “great nation” and ending with their acquiring eternal life—if they understand correctly both promises of the Abrahamic Covenant as God describes in Genesis 12:1-3.

In 9:31ff. Paul said that people can seek what God offers but not obtain it because some vital element is missing. Also in 9:31ff., the vital element was proper understanding of the Mosaic Covenant which leads to genuine belief and ultimately to belief in Jesus as the Messiah and sacrificial offering to God that brings mercy and life.

Here the vital element is God’s sovereign choice of a human being, and in this case of a Jew. Thus, “the chosen obtained” justification before God by their authentic belief that comes as a result of a changed heart. But “the rest” of the Jews “were hardened.” God chooses to exercise His grace towards certain sinful Jews, and He chooses not to exercise this same grace to many other Jews. They do not obtain His acceptance, the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, and therefore justification. Therefore, they fall short of it and are falling short of it in Paul’s day—and in our day, until the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord and Jesus returns.

This is in line with what Paul says about God in 9:18 “Therefore then, [God] has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.” God does this with Jews vs. Gentiles, and He does it with Jews vs. Jews. In 9:18 Paul used the verb σκληρύνω, while here he uses πωρόω.

²⁸⁹ καθὼς γέγραπται· ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς πνεῦμα κατανόησεως, ὀφθαλμοὺς τοῦ μὴ βλέπειν καὶ ὄτα τοῦ μὴ ἀκούειν, ἕως τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας – Paul paraphrases Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4 to the effect that it is God who has responded to the Jews’ innate sinfulness by preventing them from seeing the truth clearly and embracing it with genuine belief. It has been God’s sovereign choice as to which Jews are believers and which are unbelievers. According to the analogy of the potter and the clay, He has made certain Jews hard of heart and unable to grasp the truth with authentic belief. They do not currently have and will not obtain what they are seeking, His blessings.

In Isaiah 29, God pronounces His judgment on Jerusalem and its inhabitants, that the nations will wage war against them.

However, God will judge and destroy these nations who turn against Him and His people, the Jews, while He has also made the Jews dull and stupid when it comes to believing and obeying Him properly.

In Deuteronomy 29, Moses encourages the Israelites to obey God through the covenant which He has made with them at Mt. Horeb, but he also admits that God has not changed all their hearts in order for them to do so. Indeed, God will judge and discipline them in the future when they disobey Him and the covenant. Yet, Moses says in chapter 30 that He will eventually circumcise their hearts and bring them into the land to fulfill His promise to them.

Again, God’s sovereign choices are all over the Bible as Paul has been pointing out in the three chapters.

Isaiah 29:10 For Yahweh has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep (ὅτι πεπότικεν ὑμᾶς κύριος πνεύματι κατανόησεως). He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, the seers.

Deuteronomy 29:4 “Yet to this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear (καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς βλέπειν καὶ ὄτα ἀκούειν ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης).”

²⁹⁰ καὶ Δαυὶδ λέγει· γενηθήτω ἡ τράπεζα αὐτῶν εἰς παγίδα καὶ εἰς θήραν καὶ εἰς σκάνδαλον καὶ εἰς ἀνταπόδομα αὐτοῖς – Paul shows through a quote from Psalm 69:22,23 that “even David” adopted God’s perspective on certain Jews who are seeking to kill him, and he urged God to destroy his enemies and to prevent them from becoming authentic believers. Of course, David had the right to wish these things on people because he was the first Son of God of the Davidic Covenant and Anointed One (Messiah, Christ) as the king of Israel, serving as God’s proxy on the land and on the whole earth. Just as God calls for and brings about the destruction of His enemies, so does David have the right to do so as God’s authoritative representative within the creation.

Paul’s point is both that there were Jews in David’s day who were hostile to God and His “Messiah,” i.e., David, and that David sought his own salvation from God and encouraged Him to deal with his enemies in a just manner.

Psalm 69:22 May their table before them become a snare; and when they are in peace, may it become a trap (γενηθήτω ἡ τράπεζα αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν εἰς παγίδα καὶ εἰς ἀνταπόδοσιν καὶ εἰς σκάνδαλον). **23** May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, and make their loins shake continually (σκοτισθήτωσαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν τοῦ μὴ βλέπειν καὶ τὸν νῶτον αὐτῶν διὰ παντὸς σύγκαμψον).

²⁹¹ σκοτισθήτωσαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν τοῦ μὴ βλέπειν καὶ τὸν νῶτον αὐτῶν διὰ παντὸς σύγκαμψον – This is the continuation from Psalm 69:22 of David’s appeal to God.

²⁹² Λέγω οὖν, μὴ ἔπταισαν ἵνα πέσωσιν; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ τῷ αὐτῶν παραπτώματι ἡ σωτηρία τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰς τὸ παραζηλώσαι αὐτούς – Here is a key question from Paul, because someone could infer (again!) from all the bad things that he has said about the abject unbelief of so many Jews that God has rejected the whole group of the chosen people of the nation of Israel. Perhaps, they have stumbled to the point of falling completely out of favor with God, meaning that they have rebelled against Him to the extent that they are no longer His chosen people as an ethnic group, who once were named as those who would experience the fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Has the Jews’ rejection of God and Jesus the Messiah resulted in God’s rejection of the Jews completely? Is He done with the Jews now and will turn to only the Gentiles (or at least just the “church,” comprised of mostly Gentiles and a very few Jews) to be His people?

Paul's answer is, "No, not at all." Instead, Paul says that "through their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to annoy them terribly." God is working out His OT plans and statements which Paul quoted in 10:19 (see Deuteronomy 32:31), where the design of history is first to annoy the Jews through the message of Jesus whom they rejected and its being taught by Jews like Paul and embraced by Gentiles to motivate them eventually to embrace their own Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, after watching the Gentiles embrace him. Again, they do not become jealous per se, but annoyed and angry at what they believe to be the wrong message of Jesus and their scriptures before they finally realize that the wrong message is the right message.

At the beginning of chapter 11, Paul used himself as a prime example of God's not having abandoned the Jews. How could Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, even become a Christian through the inward work of the Spirit of God if God has abandoned the Jewish people as a group and all Jews who have rejected Jesus as the Messiah? Here is a similar point, that the unbelief of so many Jews that culminated in their executing their own king, Jesus, will not deter God from fulfilling His promises to them eventually. Paul is implying that God's faithfulness and loyalty to His promises are greater than His discipline of the Jews. In the NT, it is through mainly the book of Revelation that we know that the "great nation" of the people of Israel will occur when Jesus returns and restores the Kingdom of Israel on the land of Israel during the time of his "1,000 year" reign, which will include the his rule of the whole earth.

²⁹³ εἰ δὲ τὸ παράπτωμα αὐτῶν πλοῦτος κόσμος καὶ τὸ ἥττημα αὐτῶν πλοῦτος ἔθνων, πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν – Paul indicates that the resultant effect of the Gentiles' becoming believers is that this non-Jewish community gets rich on God's grace and the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, which include eternal salvation, at the expense of the unbelieving Jewish community. However, only for a while!! God has not finished His work with the Jews, and Paul states that they will experience the same riches and wealth of God's grace and benefit when God fulfills His promises to them in the most complete manner. "Their fullness" (τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν) is the filling out of God's promises to the Jews specifically when everyone of them will be an authentic believer and living on the land of Israel under the rule of Jesus after he returns to establish the first stage of the Kingdom of God—the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. This is also when God makes the Jews the "great nation" of Genesis 12 and they, with Jesus, rule over the Gentile world. Paul will refer to a similar "fullness of the Gentiles" in v. 25.

²⁹⁴ Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐφ' ὅσον μὲν οὖν εἰμι ἐγὼ ἔθνων ἀπόστολος, τὴν διακονίαν μου δοξάζω – Paul knows that, as the sole "apostle to the Gentiles," among whom are those in Rome to whom he is writing, he is actually working to the benefit of the Jews by fulfilling this responsibility. He is making his job just that much more magnificent by moving human history on an existential level towards God's fulfilling His promise to the Jews to make of them a "great nation" (see Genesis 12:1-3).

²⁹⁵ εἴ πως παραζηλώσω μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ σώσω τινὰς ἐξ αὐτῶν – And Paul makes his job to the Gentiles more magnificent by causing the Gentiles to be an object of annoyance to the Jews. After all, Jesus is Jewish, and so it is for the Jews first and foremost that Jesus is the Messiah (see Romans 1:16, etc.). It is not difficult to understand how Gentiles' believing in the Jewish Messiah will make stubborn and hard-hearted Jews annoyed and angry. It is through people, especially Jews like Paul, traveling around the Roman Empire and claiming that a Jewish man, who was crucified in Jerusalem several years earlier, is actually the Anointed One of the OT, whom they have been expecting to free them from their enemies and establish the restored Kingdom of Israel.

As Paul said at the beginning of chapter 9, he would give up his own salvation in order to see his fellow Jews believe in the gospel. Similarly, he would hope that they would become annoyed and angry at his proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and eventually (by only the grace of God and His work within their hearts!) become Christians themselves. Then, they too would become saved from God's wrath, condemnation, and eternal destruction.

²⁹⁶ εἰ γὰρ ἡ ἀποβολὴ αὐτῶν καταλλαγὴ κόσμου. τίς ἢ πρόσλημις εἰ μὴ ζωὴ ἐκ νεκρῶν – Paul is implying again that God has not completely abandoned all the Jews. While the "rejection" of the Messiah by most of the Jews (or God's rejection of them, because ἡ ἀποβολὴ αὐτῶν can mean either, but I think the former is correct) has resulted in God's making Gentiles His friends through their belief in Jesus, then the "acceptance" of Jesus as the Messiah by possibly more Jews than the current remnant (or God's acceptance of them, because ἡ πρόσλημις can mean either, but again, I think the former is correct) will turn out to provide them with "life," i.e., eternal life, as opposed to the destiny of death and destruction to which they are currently headed. Paul also uses the phrase ἐκ νεκρῶν, which means literally "out of the dead ones." He means that from those who are headed towards eternal death and destruction, God will produce Jews who acquire eternal life by virtue of their changed inwardness and authentic belief. Then, they will take part in the millennial kingdom of Jesus' ruling over the Jews and the world and existence on the eternal earth after God destroys this universe—both of which are described in Revelation 20 and 21-22 respectively. Thus, the "acceptance" of "some" Jews of the gospel now in Paul's day will result in their being granted life in the Kingdom of God instead of death and non-existence.

²⁹⁷ εἰ δὲ ἡ ἀπαρχὴ ἄγια, καὶ τὸ φύραμα καὶ εἰ ἡ ρίζα ἄγια, καὶ οἱ κλάδοι – In keeping with the point which Paul is making about God's faithfulness to the Jews and His not rejecting them as His chosen ethnic group during the existence of this earth, he uses two analogies—

1) The first is that of dough. If the "first portion," the initial part of the dough which the baker begins to knead, is thought by him to be important for making bread, then the rest of the dough is important also. Paul is speaking chronologically and historically. I

think he is referring to the promises which God made to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. If they were important to God such that He made these promises to them, then the promises are still in effect thousands of years later and still apply to the descendants of these three men. As a result, the promises still hold for the Jewish nation, even though many of them have not properly believed God.

2) The second analogy is that of a tree. If the “root” of the tree is important to the one tending the tree, then the “branches” are also. Again, if the very beginning of the Jewish nation with the promises to the patriarchs was important to God, then the continuation and fulfillment of these promises in the existence of future “branches” is important to Him also. These “branches” are future participants in the fulfillment of the promises to the Jews first and to Gentiles second, who adopt the same kind of belief as Abraham—as Paul will go on to explain.

Consequently, Paul is using these analogies to claim that God will remain faithful to the nation of Israel and not abandon or reject them, even though they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah and have been as disobedient to Him as they have down through their history and especially when they refused to believe that Jesus is their long-expected Messiah.

²⁹⁸ Εἰ δὲ τινες τῶν κλάδων ἐξεκλάσθησαν, σὺ δὲ ἀγριέλαιος ὢν ἐνεκεντρίσθης ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ συγκαινωνός τῆς ρίζης τῆς πίπτου τῆς ἐλαίας ἐγένου – Here, starting in v. 17, Paul continues the second analogy by admitting that some of the “branches,” i.e., individual Jews of the nation of Israel, became dislodged from the promises of God by virtue of their unbelief, while unnatural branches of sorts, Gentiles, became participants in His promises that, in Genesis 12:1-3 were first addressed to Abraham, the first Jew, and therefore to the Jews after him. Paul has already said this in chapter 9 by stating that not all those who are from Israel, i.e., Jacob, are true Israel (because of their unbelief), while Gentiles, “who were not looking for justification, laid hold of justification” (by virtue of their belief).

These promises are the very “rich root” of the tree and of the people of Israel—and of the sinful human beings who imitate Abraham’s belief (that includes the “justification” of the Gentiles and their having a standing before God of obtaining participation in the “great nation” of Israel and eternal life in the Kingdom of God). Hence, they are also the very wealth of the Gentiles, which constitutes not only participation in the “great nation” of Israel by their valuing it, but also obtaining God’s eternal mercy and life. Notice that Paul uses the singular *su* (σὺ) to encourage each individual Gentile among the Roman Christians to think about the significance of his becoming qualified for the fulfillment of God’s promises, while a whole host of Jews, who are “the chosen people of God” ethnically speaking, will miss out on the temporal and eternal elements of these promises (the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 and the eternal earth of Revelation 21-22).

We learn from the rest of the Bible that the Gentiles will participate in God’s promise to make of the Jews a “great nation” through several ways. Gentiles who were believers and died before Jesus’ return will be raised from the dead and transformed into immortal and morally perfect beings when Jesus returns, and they will rule with him over the world during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. The same will be true for Gentiles who are still alive at Jesus’ return. They will be lifted from the earth, transformed, and return to earth to reign with Jesus over the Jews on the land of Israel and over the Gentiles of the rest of the world. And, I think it is safe to assume, some Gentiles, like the Jews of the millennial kingdom, will acquire eternal life on the new and eternal earth of Revelation 21-22 with all the other believers, both Jews and Gentiles.

²⁹⁹ μὴ κατακαυχῶ τῶν κλάδων εἰ δὲ κατακαυχᾶσαι οὐ σὺ τὴν ρίζαν βαστάζεις ἀλλὰ ἡ ρίζα σέ – Nevertheless, in v. 18, Paul says that Gentiles who now participate in the Abrahamic and Israelite promises of God should not be “arrogant” or boastful and think that they have made themselves worthy of God’s blessings (as the Jews unfortunately have thought down through the centuries). This kind of arrogance on the part of believing Gentiles towards unbelieving Jews fails to appreciate the nature of the “rich root” of the promises of God which were conveyed to Abraham and his Jewish descendants in Genesis 12-21 by His grace. As Paul has pointed out and points out here, sinful people do not make themselves worthy of the promises which constitute the “root.” Instead, people, some of whom are not even seeking God’s blessings (Gentiles, as Paul says at the end of chapter 9), end up receiving them because God sovereignly and independently chooses to change them by the inward work of His Holy Spirit. Then, by His continued faithfulness to them, God causes them to persevere in their faith so as to obtain eternal life. In this way, the gracious promises of God “support” them and their inward change and faith. As a result, no human being will be able to say that his salvation has anything to do with him apart from and independent of God and His grace.

³⁰⁰ ἐρεῖς οὖν ἐξεκλάσθησαν κλάδοι ἵνα ἐγὼ ἐγκεντρίσθῶ – In v. 19, Paul anticipates a statement by prideful Gentiles who have supposedly become believers in Jesus and who think that they will acquire the fulfillment of the “rich root” of the promises of God. They say (correctly!) that the unbelieving Jews “were broken off” from their own natural olive tree of “Israel,” meaning that they have lost the opportunity to enjoy God’s promises, while believing Gentiles have taken their place on the tree when they were “grafted in” to it.

With the singular “you,” Paul writes this as though it is the individual Roman Christian who is speaking.

³⁰¹ καλῶς τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ ἐξεκλάσθησαν, σὺ δὲ τῇ πίστει ἔστηκας. μὴ ὑψηλὰ φρόνει ἀλλὰ φοβοῦ – Paul says here in v. 20 that the Gentiles are actually correct—to a degree. The Jews lost their participation in the “Israel” of the promises “because of their unbelief” (τῇ πίστει). And the Gentiles “stand” to receive the promises of God “because of [their] belief” (τῇ πίστει). But Paul is also implying everything that he has said about belief—that it ultimately comes from God and His gracious work in a human being, so that none of us has any basis on which he can brag or boast about his being accepted by God. Therefore, Paul exhorts the Roman, Gentile believers not to be “arrogant” (literally “to think high things”) and allow their pride to be a part of their

thinking about their relationship with God in contrast to unbelieving Jews, as if the latter are not good people while they deserve God's forgiveness and eternal life because of their inherent goodness. Instead, Paul wants the authentic believers to continue to "fear" (φοβοῦ) and revere God in a way that reflects their understanding that if it were not for His sovereign grace in the midst of their insoluble sin, they would end up being condemned by Him.

³⁰² εἰ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τῶν κατὰ φύσιν κλάδων οὐκ ἐφείσατο, μὴ πως οὐδὲ σοῦ φείσεται – Indeed, Paul is never presumptuous so as to think that all those who claim to believe in God and Jesus are authentic believers. Therefore, he says here in v. 21 that if his individual Gentile reader continues to be arrogant, he is only pretending to be a Christian which will mean that God will not "spare" him in the same way that He "did not spare the natural branches," the unbelieving Jews.

All unbelieving Gentiles, regardless of their claim to worship God and embrace Jesus as the Messiah, will miss out, too, on the fulfillment of God's promises the same way that unbelieving Jews will miss out on it. And this is because their arrogance demonstrates that they actually do not have authentic belief. They are striving to obtain God's acceptance and mercy with the same erroneous mentality as the Jews who are trying to earn God's favor through their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

The key Paul will say in v. 22 is to remain in God's kindness through persevering in humble faith.

But this is also to say that God is not a respecter of persons. If He has not chosen a Jew to obtain His promises by His grace, or if He has not chosen a Gentile to obtain them either, then neither one will, regardless of how religious each one may be or think that he is as a means to make himself worthy of the God's blessings. Both sinful Jews and sinful Gentiles need exactly the same mechanism to avoid God's condemnation, His gracious inward work that produces both belief and obedience in an appropriate way.

³⁰³ ἴδε οὖν χρηστότητα καὶ ἀποτομίαν θεοῦ ἐπὶ μὲν τοὺς περόντας ἀποτομία, ἐπὶ δὲ σὲ χρηστότης θεοῦ, ἐὰν ἐπιμένης τῇ χρηστότητι. ἐπεὶ καὶ σὺ ἐκκοπήσῃ – Paul continues in v. 22 to urge his Roman, Gentile, Christian reader to consider carefully who God is. He is both kind and severe. He is kind to those who genuinely repent of their sins and believe in Him and Jesus the Messiah—by His grace. And He is severe, just, and condemning towards those who are arrogant and reject Him—according to His justice, even if they are claiming to believe in Him. Therefore, "to those who fell," the Jews who have been unbelievers, God will perform His "severity," wrath, condemnation, and destruction. To those who (supposedly) have become believers, God will grant His "kindness." But this is only if they "remain in His kindness," which is to say, if they are truly changed of heart and authentic believers.

"Otherwise," Paul warns his individual reader, "You will be cut off" like all the unbelieving and arrogant Jews. The Gentile will lose his being grafted in to the natural olive tree with the rich root of the promises of God to make the nation of Israel the most powerful group of people in all history and to grant eternal life to those who imitate Abraham's humble belief. And this will be because his arrogance betrays his hard heart and unbelief. In other words, Paul is saying that the true Christian has the proper capacity to engage in genuine humility towards God and others, and he does engage in it.

Thus, with the analogy of the tree and the reality of the importance of authentic belief, Paul has presented the concepts of God's kindness (grace, mercy, and love for an individual) and His justice (judgment, condemnation, and destruction). The Jews who "fell," i.e., who were unwilling to obey God humbly and who rejected His truth, particularly the truth of Jesus' being the Messiah, are in the process of receiving God's "severity," that is, his justice and condemnation. The Gentiles, who have been grafted into the Jewish tree of God's Abrahamic promises, are receiving God's kindness. However, in order for them to obtain the fullness of God's promises, there is the condition of their persevering in authentic belief and proper obedience that includes a humility that understands their sinful condition and the necessity of God's gracious work within them—which Paul has made clear exists only according to the sovereign will of God. Otherwise, they are in the same boat as the unbelieving Jews and will incur God's wrath, condemnation, and destruction.

³⁰⁴ κάκεινοι δέ, ἐὰν μὴ ἐπιμένωσιν τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ, ἐγκεντρισθήσονται δυνατὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν ἐγκεντρίσαι αὐτούς – Likewise, Paul is saying in v. 23 that there is always the possibility that the current unbelieving Jews, "these others," become truly believing—"if they do not continue in unbelief." In which case, God will "graft them in again," obviously because He is powerful enough" to do so. God can change their hearts through the work of His Holy Spirit and make them a part of the "tree" of His promises, which according to Genesis 12, belongs to Abraham and his physical descendants on an ethnic level.

This is what the "again" means. Jews have an ethnic claim to God's promises, so that, in a sense, they begin life as children of the promise. But they will take part in them only if God powerfully changes their inwardness and they become authentic believers. They start life as ethnic Israel and therefore appear as though they are *bona fide* members of God's chosen people. However, due to their unbelief, they do not fulfill the condition necessary for participating in the greatness of the nation of Israel and in eternal life. As a result, as unqualified branches, God breaks them off, so to speak, from the natural tree of ethnic and eternal Israel (see 11:17ff.) with the result that they incur His condemnation. However, if they eventually become authentic believers, then God will make them "anew" a true and genuine part of His chosen people.

³⁰⁵ εἰ γὰρ σὺ ἐκ τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἐξεκόπης ἀγριελαιίου καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ἐνεκεντρίσθης εἰς καλλιέλαιον, πόσω μᾶλλον οὗτοι οἱ κατὰ φύσιν ἐγκεντρισθήσονται τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐλαιᾷ – Indeed, Paul has already said that, in an ethnic sense, the Jews occupy a primary position to receive God's promises to Abraham, because they are his physical descendants through the miracle baby Isaac by Sarah (and not the naturally conceived baby Ishmael by Hagar) and who will become the "great nation" of Genesis 12:1-3. They naturally (see v. 21) are branches of the "cultivated olive tree," while Gentiles originate connected to a "wild olive tree."

These latter, according to v. 24, were “cut off” from their own ethnic tree of Gentiles and then “grafted contrary to nature in [the] cultivated olive tree” of the Jews. As members of ethnic Israel, the Jews, therefore, have the right to the fulfillment of the promise of the land of Israel and the restored Davidic kingdom (which Revelation 20 describes), while the non-Jews, who come from other ethnic groups, do not per se. It is as though the Jews have the right of first refusal to the Kingdom of God—the privilege of deciding whether to accept or reject God’s promises before the promises are offered to others.

Nevertheless, according to Revelation 20, the believing Gentiles will help rule the restored Kingdom of Israel and the rest of the world, if they were believers before Jesus’ return. Or they will be welcome to live on the land of Israel with the Jews if they become believers after Jesus’ return. And Paul’s main point here is that God will “much more certainly” graft into their own ethnic tree believing Jews, which grafting, by definition, would be something that is not “contrary to nature.” Paul cannot emphasize enough that the nation of Israel, the Jews, are the rightful recipients of God’s promises—even if all of them do not end up enjoying their fulfillment, because God sovereignly chooses not to grant some of them His grace, a changed heart, and authentic belief and obedience (as Paul as admitted in chapter 9).

³⁰⁶ Οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο, ἵνα μὴ ᾗτε παρ’ ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι, ὅτι πρόωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῶ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ – It very much seems that Paul adds this paragraph of vs. 25-27 (and, we will see, vs. 28-32) so that the Roman, Gentile Christians are not arrogant and think that they have taken over from the Jews the primary position as God’s people. Plus, it may be that he wants to make sure that they are not relying on only what they have learned so far about the biblical message, which may not be as complete as that which Paul is presenting to them.

As in other places where Paul uses the word “mystery,” it refers to something that is predicted in the Old Testament and will eventually happen in human history when it is the right time for God to bring it about, and then it becomes obvious to those who are willing to see clearly what God is doing. The “mystery” remains “hidden” of sorts until the actual event arrives, and then it is seen by only those whose hearts God changes so that they do not remain spiritually blind to it. Then it is out in the open, and everyone who has eyes to see will see it and believe it.

Therefore, a “mystery” is also something that requires God to open a sinful person’s mind and heart in order to recognize it and understand it correctly. In this case, Paul has been pointing out that there are verses in the Old Testament that indicate that the Jews have rejected in the past, do reject in the present, and will continue to reject in the future God, their God (because they are His chosen people), while the Gentiles, who more naturally create a religion of false gods within the creation, embrace instead the one, true God. Here he plainly states the fact of the Jews’ rejection of God—a “partial hardening has occurred to Israel.” In other words, there is only a relatively small group of Jews, a “remnant” according to 11:5, of which Paul is one of them, who are genuinely believing in God and in Jesus as the Messiah, such that this will be the case for a period of time. On the other hand, there is clearly a large portion of Jews who do not believe, which Paul calls a “partial hardening... to Israel.”

And he goes on to say that this will be the spiritual condition of the Jewish nation “until the fullness of Gentiles has come in.” Paul has been emphasizing God’s sovereign choice of both Jews and Gentiles whom He changes inwardly so that they become authentic believers in Him and in Jesus. And there are a couple of options for what he means by “the fullness of Gentiles”—

- 1) The moment when the last Gentile in God’s plans becomes a believer
- 2) The last moment when the Gentiles are exercising more power and dominance in the world politically, economically, and spiritually than the Jews
- 3) The last moment of God’s having shifted the label “chosen people” from the Jews to the believing community, the church, and Jesus returns to end the present realm and usher in living believers into the eternal Kingdom of God, what some people refer to as heaven

I think that Paul means #2. He wrote in 11:12 of the “fullness” of the Jews. There, I interpreted him to mean God’s fulfilling His promises to the Jews when everyone of them will be an authentic believer and living on the land of Israel under the rule of Jesus after he returns to establish the first stage of the Kingdom of God—the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. This is also when God will make the Jews the “great nation” of Genesis 12 and they, with Jesus, rule over the Gentile world.

In line with this interpretation, I think that Paul in v. 25 is describing God’s finishing His plan whereby He has allowed (even caused) the Gentiles to exercise hegemony over the world and over the Jews and reverses this condition so that the Jews become dominant in the world as stated in Deuteronomy 28:13-14—

Deuteronomy 28:13 “Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, **28:14** and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

It seems that most commentators, if they do not hold to replacement theology that excludes the nation of Israel from God’s promises to Abraham, believe Paul to be talking about the last predestined Gentile to become a believer before God fulfills His promise to the nation of Israel when He makes them the “great nation” of Genesis 12. But it makes more sense to me in the light of God’s stated plan in Deuteronomy 28 for both the Jews and the Gentiles that he is referring to the option of a shift in greatness from the Gentiles in the rest of the world to the Jews on the land of Israel. It will also be then that Jesus will return, which will trigger God’s changing the hearts of all Jews who survive The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord of Malachi 4:5, which coincides with the last days of the rule of the Gentile Beast of Revelation (the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2).

Nevertheless, and during the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 when Jesus and the Jews rule the whole world, there will probably be additional Gentiles throughout the world who will become believers—just as all the Jews who live during this time

period will be genuine followers of Jesus as their Messiah and king.

³⁰⁷ καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται, καθὼς γέγραπται ἤξει ἐκ Σιών ὁ ῥυόμενος, ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ – If Paul really is talking about a major global political change, which I think he is, then *houtos* (οὕτως) at the beginning of v. 26 means either “in this way” or “without further ado” as I have translated it, referring either to the time of the salvation of the Jews as the “great nation” of Abraham or the simple fact that God, of course, remains faithful to His promises and saves all of national Israel. As soon as God has finished granting rule of the world to the Gentiles, He will transfer this to the Jews “in this way” or “without further ado”—without straying from His sovereign plans or without there being one second of delay in regard to His fulfilling His promise to the nation of Israel. And this promise Paul states as “all Israel will be saved.”

There are at two likely options for what Paul means by these words—

1) “all Israel” refers to all the Jews and the Gentiles who, by the end of history, have become the new Israel and chosen people of God because of their genuine belief in Jesus the Messiah. Bible students like to call this total group “the church”—in line with replacement theology.

2) “all Israel” means every Jew on the earth who lives through God’s final judgment and discipline of them, so that they become the first generation of believing Jews during the “millennial kingdom” of Revelation 20 under Jesus’ rule as their king.

Paul quotes three prophetic passages in the Old Testament, Isaiah 59:20-21a; Isaiah 27:9; and Jeremiah 31:33-34, that help us figure out which option is correct.

The first passage is Isaiah 59:20 in this verse,

Isaiah 59:20 “A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob (גֹּאֲלֵךְ וְלִשְׁבֵי כְּשָׁע בְּיַעֲקֹב) (καὶ ἤξει ἕνεκεν Σιών ὁ ῥυόμενος καὶ ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ),” declares Yahweh.

There is one word in Paul’s Greek text that is different from the LXX – ἐκ (out of, from) instead of ἕνεκεν (because of, for the sake of). If Paul means “out of,” which he probably does, then he is emphasizing that the “one who delivers” and saves Israel comes from Israel themselves. The Deliverer of Israel, and we know his name to be Jesus of Nazareth, will arrive “out of” the Jews, meaning directly from them and in order to save the nation of Israel from their earthly enemies, their sin, and ultimately God’s eternal condemnation. This is to say that Isaiah 59:20 is a prediction that God will indeed cause the Jews to become a nation of people who are properly obedient to Him, which now we know must include their authentic belief in Jesus the Messiah. This points us to the second option above. When God has reached the place in His plans and purposes and ends the Gentiles’ rule of the world, He will shift this rule to the Jews in the midst of producing a mass revival of heart, mind, and faith among the Jews on the land of Israel which He has given them.

This is symbolized in the vision of the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20 after Jesus returns and restores the Kingdom of Israel.

³⁰⁸ καὶ αὕτη αὐτοῖς ἡ παρ’ ἐμοῦ διαθήκη, ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν –

Then, in v. 27, Paul quotes only the first part of Isaiah 59:21 and refers to the second part of this verse while he also conflates portions of Isaiah 27:9 and Jeremiah 31:33-34 when he writes, “and this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Very simply, Paul finishes his statements of v. 26 from Isaiah 59:20 by quoting the first part of Isaiah 59:21. Then, he borrows a small part of Isaiah 27:9 and alludes to two small parts of Jeremiah 31:33-34 to complete the idea. Isaiah 59:20 indicates that God will rescue His people, the Jews, from their sins (and, by extrapolation, from the harmful intents of their earthly enemies), and doing so will be that to which He is committed as a “covenant” with them. The completion of this idea by Paul is to say explicitly that God will be “the One who delivers” them “when [He] take[s] away their sins”—a clear reference to a portion of the second line of Isaiah 27:9. And we know that He forgives them only on the basis of Jesus life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Plus, we notice that the last and larger part of Isaiah 59:21 says just exactly this, “My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,” says Yahweh, “from now and into perpetuity.” In other words, Paul is paraphrasing this longer statement, that God’s mercy towards the Jews will go on “into perpetuity” during the existence of their “offspring” and their “offsprings’ offspring.” God’s commitment to and forgiveness of the Jews will never end, and I suggest that this is as long as their restored Kingdom of Israel lasts under the rule of Jesus their Messiah on the land which God promised them in Genesis 12:1-3. The two verses from Jeremiah 31 are saying the same thing—that God makes a “covenant...with the house of Israel” such that He will “forgive their iniquity, and their sin [He] will remember no more.” Therefore, God is explicitly declaring that this covenant and this forgiveness will be *for the Jews*.

Isaiah 59:21 As for Me, this is My covenant with them (וְזֵאת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּהֶם) (καὶ αὕτη αὐτοῖς ἡ παρ’ ἐμοῦ διαθήκη),” says Yahweh: “My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,” says Yahweh, “from now and into perpetuity.”

Isaiah 27:9 Therefore through this Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven; and this will be the full price of the pardoning of his sin (וְזֶה כָּל-כֶּסֶף הַכִּזְבִּיב הַכֹּסֵף הַטָּהוֹר) (καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶν ἡ εὐλογία αὐτοῦ, ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν = when I take away his sin): when he makes all the altar stones like pulverized chalk stones; when Asherim and incense altars will not stand.

Jeremiah 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days (וְשָׂרְאֵל אֶחְרִי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם) (כִּי זֵאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרֵת אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרַיִם הַיָּמִים הָהֵם) (αὕτη ἡ διαθήκη, ἣν διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκεῖνας),” declares

Yahweh, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 31:34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares Yahweh, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (וְלֹא-אֶזְכֹּר אֶת-חַטֹּאתֵיהֶם וְאֶת-חַיְבוּתֵיהֶם אֲנִי יְיָ) (ὅτι ἵλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἐτι).”

This also points us to the second option above. God has made the New Covenant with the Jews and will forgive their sins through Jesus the Messiah, which will become the basis for His shifting the rule of the world from the Gentiles to the Jews when he brings in the “fullness” of both groups—the end of world domination by the Gentiles and the beginning of world domination by the Jews. Paul is implying that whatever unbelief the Jews have suffered as a group after Jesus’ first coming, it will eventually be counteracted by the mass revival when “all Israel will be saved” as stated in Romans 11:26. And, I think makes sense that such a renewal of the Jews will occur at Jesus’ second coming when God establishes the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 on the land of Israel and throughout the world.

³⁰⁹ κατὰ μὲν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἐχθροὶ δι’ ὑμᾶς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας – Here, in v. 28, Paul is continuing to explain that eventually all the Jews alive at the end of the present age will become authentic believers in God and in Jesus the Messiah. He says to his Gentile readers that the Jews have actually been God’s “enemies with respect to the good news” because of their unbelief and unwillingness to embrace God as He really is and His truth. But Paul states that the Jews’ unbelief has been and is for the benefit of these Christians in Rome, so that the gospel has not only gone out to them, but also, through God’s sovereign choice and grace, has had a positive effect on them and caused some of them to become authentic believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. By means of the Jews’ lack of interest in the true truth, the Gentiles have embraced “the good news” in the midst of the Jews’ rejecting it.

Nevertheless, the unbelieving Jews, indeed all the Jews, “are beloved with respect to the choice on account of the fathers.” In Genesis 12 and the rest of Genesis, God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be the recipients of His promises to make them and their physical descendants the most powerful nation in human history and to grant them the blessing of eternal life if they demonstrated authentic belief—which we know the three “fathers” did. Therefore, the Jews have always existed under these promises with the potential to be eternally loved by God and made true Jews with circumcised hearts, who experience all that God has promised His people, just as the Roman, Gentile, believing Christians can look forward to participating in these same promises when Jesus returns and inaugurates the Kingdom of God as described by the Old Testament prophets and Revelation 20-22.

³¹⁰ ἀμεταμέλητα γὰρ τὰ χαρίσματα καὶ ἡ κλήσις τοῦ θεοῦ – In. 29, Paul ends the sentence with a very important statement with respect to God’s dealings with the Jews in human history in the present realm. His “gracious gifts” to them of His promises that He gave to Abraham, and the “calling” of them as His chosen people ethnically, so that they will eventually see the fulfillment of His promises, “are with no regret.” The word ἀμεταμέλητος comes from μεταμελομαι, which means to be very sorry for what has done to the extent that he wishes it could be undone. For example—

Matthew 27:3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse (μεταμεληθεὶς) and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.

By putting the alpha, ἀ, as a prefix at the beginning of μεταμέλητος, Paul is saying that God has had no regrets making the promises He did to the Jews, in spite of their continued disobedience and unwillingness to be exactly the kind of people He has commanded them to be. Instead, He remains faithful to His “gracious gifts” and “calling” to them, so that He will still fulfill His promises to them when Jesus returns. Otherwise, He is a liar.

Therefore, God never changes His promises to them throughout history. And this is in spite of their rejecting Jesus by executing and killing him through crucifixion. But God in no way abandons the Jews altogether, even though, during their existence, He has judged them and disciplined them harshly for their unbelief and disobedience. For example, they went through the destructions of the northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians (722 B.C.), of the southern Kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians (586 B.C.), and of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans (A.D. 70 and 132-135).

Nevertheless, God’s promise to the “fathers,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to make of their physical descendants a “great nation” (see Genesis 12:1-3), one that is filled with authentic believers like Abraham and one that rules the world as the Gentiles have, will be fulfilled sometime in the future. The prophets of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation indicate that this will coincide with the coming of the Messiah, i.e., the second appearance of Jesus when he returns and inaugurates the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. Plus, the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jews will happen, Paul is saying, because a promise by God is a promise. He never reneges, so that the Jews always remain the ethnic chosen people of God in human history, in spite of many of them rejecting their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, over such a long period of time (two thousand years so far).

³¹¹ ὥσπερ γὰρ ὑμεῖς ποτε ἠπειθήσατε τῷ θεῷ, νῦν δὲ ἠλεήθητε τῇ τούτων ἀπειθείᾳ – Paul continues explaining to His Roman, Gentile Christian readers that their situation is analogous to that of the unbelieving Jews. These Romans, as pagan idolators, were “formerly...disobedient” to God, so that they were subject to His wrath and eternal judgment, condemnation, and destruction. However, because of the Jews’ “disobedience” and refusing to embrace their own Messiah Jesus, God has sent the message about him to the Gentiles, and they “now have been granted mercy” through becoming authentic believers in Jesus (which Paul implies has happened only by virtue of God’s having changed their hearts).

They have found God’s eternal forgiveness by becoming like what all the Jews eventually will be—genuine followers of their

Messiah through God's changing their hearts.

³¹² οὕτως καὶ οὗτοι νῦν ἠπειθήσαν τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἐλέει, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ νῦν ἐλεηθῶσιν – Then, here in v. 31, Paul finishes the analogy of the tree with its root of the promises of God and the branches of authentic believers, who are both Jews and Gentiles, by saying the situation is essentially reversed. The Jews are “now disobedient” and basically the “pagan idolators” of sorts while the Gentiles are “being granted mercy” and have become the accepted people of God. However, this is only so that “these,” the Jews, “may be granted mercy” both “now” and in the future (which is really in the future when Jesus returns) when they as an entire ethnic group become authentic believers and obtain God's forgiveness and mercy as the Gentiles have done so for many years up to this time that is coming.

³¹³ συνέκλεισεν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς πάντας εἰς ἀπειθειαν, ἵνα τοὺς πάντας ἐλεήσῃ – In v. 32, Paul ends his history lesson of God's relationships to Jews and Gentiles.

There are two options for Paul's meaning of the first “all” (τοὺς πάντας) and the second “all” (τοὺς πάντας)—

1) all peoples of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, and all peoples of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, so that some Jews and some Gentiles receive God's mercy

2) all the Jews, so that some Jews receive God's mercy

The context of referring to both Jews and Gentiles leads in the direction of #1.

Therefore, Paul is saying that “all” the different groups of people, the Jews and the Gentiles, have experienced unbelief and disobedience of God, because “God encloses” them in the inherent sin of their human natures. (It also makes more sense to translate both aorist tense verbs in this verse with the present tense since Paul is describing a general theological principle.) But this has been “in order that He may show mercy to all” the different groups.

Fortunately, God causes all the peoples and nations to some degree to experience changed hearts and authentic belief which results in God's mercy. Thus, even though the Jews are God's chosen people, ethnically speaking in the present realm, He has always intended that both some of the Jews and some of the Gentiles participate in His eternal forgiveness through Jesus the Messiah as their advocate and not by means of the Mosaic Covenant, which is strictly a Jewish covenant.

Option #2 would be that the first “all” refers to all the Jews, that God has hardened their hearts, so that eventually He may show mercy to some of the Jews both before and during the Millennial Kingdom. In this way, the second “all” refers to the Jews whose hearts God changes before Jesus' return and definitely after he does when all the Jews of the Millennial Kingdom will have changed hearts. But in the context of speaking of both the Jews and the Gentiles, I am inclined to think that Paul is referring to the first option above.

³¹⁴ Ὡς βάθος πλούτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ – After using the last three chapters to give his readers a history lesson on God's purposes for humanity, Paul now steps back and wonders at His magnificence and that it involves a rather complicated story about the Jewish nation and its individuals and about the Gentile nations and their individuals. He has explained that God is demonstrating His character and featuring His justice and mercy whereby different Jews will experience one or the other and different Gentiles will also experience one or the other, thus culminating in the end of the *present* age with a final display of God's faithfulness to the Jews when He causes them to become the most powerful nation in history.

Certainly, God's wisdom and knowledge of the created reality as He works out His purposes regarding His justice and mercy are so deep (“Oh the depth”, Ὡς βάθος) that it is impossible to understand (“unfathomable”, ἀνεξεραύνητα and “incomprehensible”, ἀνεξιχνίαστοι) all there is about what He is doing and causing to happen in the entire cosmos and this world (“His decrees”, τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ and “His ways”, αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ). God decrees and determines that the history of the people of Israel and the peoples of all other races, colors, and creeds be what it is. And all we can do is marvel at what He is doing with them, while declaring first that we do not really grasp all there is to know about Him, and second that at least we have the biblical information to guide us in comprehending as much as we can.

We may often ask, “Why in the world is such and such happening,” or “Why would God even allow such things to happen?” And while we do not know the complete answers to these questions, God always does and encourages us to trust Him. We must trust Him that He knows exactly what He is doing in bringing about the circumstances of human history to the conclusion that He has planned in the present, temporary realm and that will continue into the future, eternal realm.

While κρίμα can mean “judgment,” it can also mean “decree,” which makes more sense in this context—that Paul is talking about God's sovereign and determined decrees with respect to the story that He is telling.

³¹⁵ τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο – Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 in verse 34. God's mind is so vast that only He knows all that He knows—meaning that we are granted a glimpse into a part of His broad and unfathomable knowledge through observing the creation and human history while also learning the truth about Him as presented in the Bible. Plus, God's wisdom is so great that only He can and needs to advise Himself on what He ought to do with respect to the creation and how He ought to direct the story of human history. No matter how difficult it is for us to accept the reality and events of human history, both good and evil, we have to trust that God knows exactly what He is doing in telling the story as He is, right down to the existence of every detail.

Again, it makes sense that the both aorist tense verbs have a present tense meaning as general principles. But the English “has become” is appropriate for the meaning of the second verb.

Isaiah 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of Yahweh (הַיְהוָה הַיָּדָדִים הַיְהוָה הַיָּדָדִים) (τίς ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου), or as His counselor has informed Him (וְנִצְּוֹתָי וְנִצְּוֹתָי שְׂאֵלָה) (καὶ τίς αὐτοῦ σύμβουλος ἐγένετο, ὃς συμβιβᾷ αὐτόν);?

³¹⁶ ἢ τίς προέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ – Here in v. 35, Paul communicates the ideas of Job 35:7 and 41:11. No one can say that he can provide something to God such that He is obligated to repay him. God in His providence and as the transcendent author and owner of the entire creation is always the giver to all human beings so that they owe Him—and not the other way around. For example, God grants His grace and mercy to sinful human beings who deserve only His justice and condemnation.

We do not trigger God with our actions, even with our religious practices, to act on our behalf. God triggers us with His authorial dynamic to act on His behalf. For example, we do not trigger God with our prayer to respond to us. He triggers us with His sovereign actions of creating our story to pray, to believe, to obey, and to respond to Him. Nevertheless, our tendency is to view the Bible as directing us to engage in our religious practices to motivate God to act on our behalf—as the Pharisees and scribes believed in Jesus’ and Paul’s day, instead of viewing the Bible correctly as directing us to believe, obey, and relate to God on the assumption that He is persistently working within us to cause our existences to be exactly as He wants them to be.

Job 35:7 “If you are righteous, what do you give to Him (יָלֵךְ יְהוָה מִמֶּנִּי וְיִקַּח מִיָּדִי) (ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐδὲν δίκαιος εἶ, τί δώσεις αὐτῷ), or what does He receive from your hand (יָלֵךְ יְהוָה מִיָּדִי וְיִקַּח מִיָּדִי) (ἢ τί ἐκ χειρός σου λήμψεται);?”

Job 41:11 “Who has given to Me that I should repay him (כִּי אֶשְׂכַּרְתִּי מִיָּדִי וְיִקַּח מִיָּדִי) (ἢ τίς ἀντιστήσεται μοι καὶ ὑπομενεῖ)? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine (כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תַּחַת שָׁמַיִם לִי) (εἰ πάντα ἢ ὑπ’ οὐρανὸν ἐμή ἐστιν).”

³¹⁷ ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν τὰ πάντα: αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν – Here, in Romans 11:36, Paul summarizes quickly and precisely the exact relationship between God as the Creator and all the other elements which exist and which can be said to be created. In other words, they are not God. This relationship is such that every element and detail of the creation is ultimately a product of God’s making it. In addition, every element exists with God’s being the one who is most interested in it. Regardless of how fascinated by some aspect of the creation we might be, no one is more intrigued by it than God, because He is the one who made it. In other words, it exists because He wants, desires, and purposes for it to exist.

Otherwise, He would not have made it. And He has created every element, for example, every electron, proton, and neutron in the 200 billion galaxies of the universe, as something which participates in His purposes of bringing about the eternal Kingdom of God with Jesus as its king. We may use something for our own human purposes, but God uses everything for His divine purposes which far exceed ours in their meaning, value, and worth. But this is also to say that He causes our use of whatever we use because He wants it used for His sovereign and unique purpose.

To these basic ideas of the connection between God and the creation, Paul responds with a kind of doxology that God should and will get all the praise and applause (ἡ δόξα) for what HE is doing, that, according to the Bible, will go on forever into eternity and all the “ages” that could possibly exist with God as their creator (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας).

Finally, Paul ends this section with a simple “Amen” (ἀμήν) from the Hebrew language, meaning “May this all be affirmed by me and everyone else who understands God with the limited knowledge we have as human beings.”

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul says, “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus the Messiah, in the light of whom are all things, and we exist in the light of him (ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν εἰς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν καὶ εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα, καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ).”

³¹⁸ Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν – Because the Mosaic Covenant’s sacrifices lack eternal value and Jesus has already given his body as an offering to God in order to qualify for his role as our eternal king and high-priest, the only legitimate offering left for his followers, whether Gentiles or Jews, to present to God is themselves—especially as a thank-offering like those in the Mosaic Covenant. By presenting themselves to God, we Christians offer our all—our minds, hearts, bodies, and wills (as meant by the words τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν). Also, instead of a dead animal, our thank offering is a living being (ζῶσαν). We thank God for all that He has done for us by giving Him all that we are—body, existence, and spirit.

Plus, these Gentile Christians in Rome have grown up presenting various sacrifices to the pagan gods of that culture. Now that they have become Christians, they no longer will be going to the temples of false gods and making animal and food offerings to them. Instead, Paul is exhorting them to present one sacrifice and to make one offering to the one God who has sent His Messiah to rescue them from His eternal condemnation—themselves.

The offering of ourselves to God as sinful human beings also needs to be “set apart” and different from the world (ἁγίαν), not in a passive way of simply being a recipient of God’s grace and what He has done for us, but truly active from the inside out, from the change inwardly that God has caused that reveals itself in our everyday moral and practical choices. This section is all about Paul’s stating the theology of Christian living that is filled with our willful choices as free moral agents who demonstrate our faith as sinners who never perfectly succeed at morality this side of eternity, but who continuously repent of our sin while pursuing morality, and wait expectantly and confidently for God to transform us into morally perfect beings when Jesus returns. But it is also important to realize that Paul is writing these exhortations of Christian living to those who are in Rome, just as he tailors the same kind of exhortations to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and others.

The question that Paul is answering is, “What is the holy and set apart way to live life as a Christian in Rome, the capital city of

the Roman Empire?” So the real work of Christianity is deep in our beings where we tend to be resistant to obeying God. Instead, we work as hard as we have to in order to choose to submit to Him, His sovereignty, and His call to us to be different and act differently from this world. We are to choose a life that pleases God instead of displeasing Him, i.e., with the goodness which we know in our minds and is spelled out in the Bible. As a result, Paul wants these Roman Christians to live lives that are truly pleasing to God (εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ).

Thus, after explaining in the previous 11 chapters, and especially chapters 9-11 (see, for example, 11:28-32), how God in His graciousness has shown mercy and forgiveness to both Jews and Gentiles (διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν τοῦ θεοῦ), Paul exhorts his readers to do the right and reasonable thing, which is to say to God, “Here I am. I choose to follow and obey You alone with my whole being regardless of what the world encourages me to do.”

Romans 11:28 On the one hand, they are enemies with respect to the good news on your account. On the other hand, they are beloved with respect to the choice on account of the fathers, **11:29** because the gracious gifts and calling of God are with no regret. **11:30** Just as you formerly were disobedient to God and now have been granted mercy because of these ones’ disobedience, **11:31** so also these are now disobedient for your being granted mercy, so that they now may be granted mercy. **11:32** God encloses all in disobedience, in order that He may show mercy to all.

Louw & Nida **λογικός, ἡ, ὄν:** pertaining to being genuine, in the sense of being true to the real and essential nature of something — ‘rational, genuine, true.’

This Paul indicates is the genuine (and therefore logical, reasonable in contrast to something that simply does not make sense) way to carry out a ritual towards God in worship of Him (τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν) in lieu of any rituals which God prescribed in the Mosaic Covenant (for example, what a priest does in the temple = λατρεία). It does not involve bringing bulls and goats or other material things as offerings to the temple in Jerusalem. It involves only presenting ourselves to God wherever we are and whatever we are doing, because it is both our hearts of belief and a desire to be obedient to God that really count. And God mercifully has caused and continues to cause this to be our choice whereby we desire righteousness through the inner work of His Spirit. Thus, we happen to be, by God’s grace and our moral choices, “living...sacrificial thank-offering[s]” to God. Thus, the Christian’s “ritual,” corresponding to the rituals of the Mosaic Covenant, is to live morally before God—whether Jew or Gentile.

³¹⁹ καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον – Here in vs. 2-8, Paul presents a parenthesis both on the theology of Christian thinking in comparison to the thinking of the world and on the theology of a Christian group nature. The first is attention to God’s will that results in personal humility, and the second is lovingly interdependence like that of the members of the human body.

After God has changed our hearts, we begin living differently from the world by filling our minds with truth from the Bible and the good news of Jesus as the Messiah. This is what allows us to choose to act differently, because we know what God is doing and what He commands when it comes to genuine morality.

There are two ways to live life in this world. One is to adopt the philosophies, mindsets, values, purposes, and intentions of a world which is fundamentally hostile to God and His message in the Bible. This is to “be conformed to this age.” The other is to learn as much as possible about what God has said in regard to Himself and us from the Bible and commit ourselves to pursuing life in conformity with who God is and what He commands and requires. This is “not” to be “conformed to this age” (μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ). Obviously, Paul is urging his Gentile, Christian readers to do the latter and not the former, so that they may please God in the choices of their lives and arrive at the divinely intended and guaranteed goal of those who do so—eternal mercy and life (τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον).

They are to “be transformed by the renewing of their mind” (μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς) by considering it “worth paying attention to what the will of God is” (τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ).

While Paul is writing these exhortations to specifically Roman Christians, certainly this parenthesis pertains to all Christians—both Jews and Gentiles.

³²⁰ Λέγω γὰρ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ’ ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν, ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως – Therefore, this is how Paul wants people to be renewed in their minds. Our tendency is to think what great things we can do in and of ourselves and for ourselves in order to enhance our standing within the world. This comes from pride and must have been part of the Romans’ mentality as they sought to become great within their culture. Likewise, we tend to think what great things we can do for God to get Him to respond to us with His blessings and to change the world for Christ (just as unbelieving Judaism tends to think what great things they are doing for God by obeying the Mosaic Covenant that will result in the blessing of the promises to Abraham). And the Roman Christians may even think that Paul is greater in God’s eyes than they are because he is an apostle of the Messiah. But maybe through their religious practices they can achieve a status almost equal to Paul’s.

But Paul is encouraging his readers not to think this way about themselves, “not to think more highly of [themselves] than [they] ought to think” (παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ’ ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν). Instead, he wants them to think in such a way that they “have an accurate grasp of reality” (εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν), in the light of God’s being the source of all reality, while they are just clay pots on His potter’s wheel (according to Paul in Romans 9). As a result, they should think of themselves and of him in very much humble terms. To live a life pleasing to God requires a level of humility that is willing to have God grant just as much grace as He desires to a person with the result of an understanding of reality that falls short of greatness as this world thinks of

greatness, but is still much more than if a person ignores the biblical message. This is the “measure” or amount of guarantee of obtaining eternal life that God has given to each Christian and that He wants each particular person to experience in this life as every Christian heads towards the goal of the eternal Kingdom of God (ἐκάστω ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως). Consequently, Paul is using the word *pistis* (πίστις) not to mean faith, as in Christian faith, but to mean the guarantee and commitment which God Himself has made and then given to each Christian by assigning each one a specific and important role within the collection of Christians. Thus, God has granted to each Christian a portion of His “token,” i.e., His trust and guarantee and commitment in that He has entrusted and committed to each Christian a role that is part of His fulfilling His faithfulness and promises to grant the Kingdom of God to authentic believers. This role is each individual Christian’s story, predetermined by God as a means to aid all other Christians in their enduring the trials of life with their faith, so as to enter into the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. These roles and personal stories are not what we give to God, but what He gives to us by His grace and that we humbly receive as we serve Him and our fellow believers in the role and manner that He desires. Paul describes this also in Ephesians 3 and in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Therefore, the roles that we end up performing, especially within the community of believers, of our own personal lives, become that tangible representation of the future promise which God will give us of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Similar to the song of the Old Rugged Cross, we will exchange our stories (in accordance with the cross of the Messiah), given to us by God’s grace, for the guaranteed outcome and goal of eternal life (the crown of life in the Kingdom of God).

³²¹ καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι πολλὰ μέλη ἔχομεν, τὰ δὲ μέλη πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πράξιν – The Roman Christians have probably never pursued or experienced a truly loving community where they genuinely care for each other in a healthy and biblical way. But here Paul wants them to realize that they have a completely different kind of relationship with their fellow Christians and likens the collection of them to the parts of a human body. His point is going to be that just as each part of the body does something different from other parts (eyes do not hear, and legs do not see), so also each Christian does something slightly different from other Christians (not everyone focuses on teaching, and teachers do not focus on being merciful with cheerfulness—even though every Christian should be ready to teach or be merciful or server, etc.). In other words, each Christian’s role (*praxis*, πράξις = function) and story is slightly different from those of all other Christians. And like a human body where the individual parts of the body are not only attached to one another but also help each other live in unison of purpose and goal with one another, Christians do the same with and for one another.

In this way, Paul implies that God does not need our great actions for Him to motivate Him or to change the world for Christ. What God “needs” (because He does not need us at all) is our living out *what He has given us*, the unique functions and roles within the community of believers in which we reside on a daily basis—as the pattern and means that He has established to further His purposes both among those who are genuine believers and among those who are unbelievers. We do not really give anything to God, even ourselves. We receive what He has given us, our spiritual gifts or roles within the Christian community, and we humbly live out these roles as that which is our responsibility before Him. It is our humble and devoted lives that are our gifts to Him, because He has first given them to us (similar to what John says in [1 John 4:19](#) We love because He first loved us.). Everything we do derives from what God is doing in and with us.

Also, this being the first explicit communication from an apostle to these new Roman, Gentile Christians, it makes sense that Paul would want to educate them on the nature of their relationship to one another and to other Christians in the Roman Empire, including to him as an apostle who proclaims the gospel message better than other Christians do. This is why he is using the 1st person plural pronoun “we” in vs. 4-9. Plus, he knows that Jews are returning to Rome after being absent from the city for approximately six years (A.D. 48-54), so that Jewish and Gentile Christians will have to believe together and love one another as co-followers of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. The Roman Christians have not been used to doing this, even though the returning Jewish Christians have. Consequently, it will be a little strange for the Romans to see and experience the two ethnic groups in a combined, close religious context.

³²² οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σῶμά ἐσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, τὸ δὲ καθ’ εἰς ἀλλήλων μέλη – Thus every Christian, one among “many” (οἱ πολλοὶ) Christians, who make up the “one body in the Messiah” (ἐν σῶμά...ἐν Χριστῷ), has a specific *praxis*, function or role within the collection of Christians as “members of one another” (τὸ δὲ καθ’ εἰς ἀλλήλων μέλη), where their primary association is with the Messiah.

Like the “many” members or parts of a human body, there are “many” Christians in every community of Christians in the cities of the Roman Empire (and the same is true today in the world), but each Christian is an individual, whom God has assigned a specific and unique function within that community and within the whole collection of Christians worldwide.

And the implied idea is that God causes each Christian to perform his function by means of His sovereign grace and plans.

³²³ ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα, εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως – Paul is saying that each Christian is graced or gifted his “different” (διάφορα) role within the broader and certainly narrower collection of single, individual Christians. Thus there are “different gifts,” i.e., different roles and activities that God causes “according to the proportion of His token as a guarantee” (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως). Again, God proportions so to speak His grace and the promise of eternal salvation and life to each, individual Christian. This means, too, that the role, function, and activity of the function are not things that the individual Christian gives to God, but that God gives to him—as He desires (see especially [1 Corinthians 12:11](#) “And all these things the one and the same Spirit works as He allots to each individual just as He wants (καθὼς βούλεται),”

and

1 Corinthians 12:18 “But, as it is, God has placed the members, each one of them in the body just as He desired (καθὼς ἠθέλησεν.)”

The roles, functions, and activities that Paul lists here are—

1) First, prophecy, i.e., conveying truth in accordance with God’s guaranteeing that He will fulfill His promises of granting the Kingdom of God, which will include both the “great nation” of Israel and the eternal earth, to believers in the Messiah through His communication of this information to human beings. At this point in history, this communication is by means of and has its source in the OT and the apostles, although there were “prophets” among the apostles who also communicated their message with great accuracy. Because Paul lists teachers separately, he most likely is mainly referring to apostles by the word “prophets” as the NT spokesmen for God, even though there were men who could be considered “prophets” distinct from apostles (see, for example—

1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now, you are the body of the Messiah and members among members. **12:28** And God has placed them in the gathering—first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then powerful deeds, then gifts of healings, helpful deeds, guides, kinds of languages. **12:29** Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all do powerful deeds, do they? **12:30** Not all have gifts of healings, do they? Not all speak with languages, do they? Not all translate these languages, do they? **12:31** Nevertheless, be committed to the greater gifts.”

and

Ephesians 4:11 “And He gave on the one hand apostles, and on the other hand prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers **4:12** for the equipping of those who have been set apart for the work of service, for the building up of the Messiah’s body, **4:13** until we all arrive at the unity of belief in and understanding of the Son of God, to be the man who has completed his goal (*telos*) (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον), to the measure of the extent of the Messiah’s fullness.”)

Thus, rather than list apostles separately, for the Romans’ sake, who have not yet encountered an actual apostle but only a “prophet” or “prophets” who had heard the information about Jesus from an apostle and then spoke to them about Jesus as the Messiah, he focuses on people who not only grasp the apostolic message more clearly than others, but also can talk about it more clearly and coherently than others—because of their close relationship with an apostle. But they are still just “members” of the “body” of the Messiah and should not think of themselves more highly than other Christians—because their gift and giftedness to speak the truth is a gift of God and His grace. Even if they were bright and articulate before they became Christians, these two skills and abilities were as a result of God’s having created them such. They did not make themselves bright and articulate. God did. Therefore, their gift from God started with His planning to create them and then reached its fruition when He caused them to become Christians and they spoke about Jesus to others *after learning the gospel from an apostle*.

³²⁴ εἴτε διακονίαν ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ – Here Paul is simply saying that performing our functions, our *praxis*, is enough. We do not have to do something to motivate God to act on our behalf, to act on behalf of others, or to change the world. We just have to do what God has given us within the collection of Christians and within the world—as the manner by which we “present” our “bodies” to God as a “sacrificial thank-offering” (see 12:1). And each one of us can feel good about already having a high standing before God, even if the world does not consider our belief, function, or eternal status to be of any significance.

2) The second function and activity is “serving” for the benefit of helping people in their Christian existences in this realm. It, too, is another important function within the collection of Christians.

3) Like prophets, the third function is as teachers, who take what the apostles have conveyed from their authoritative position and repeat it to other Christians within their own personal communities of believers. The intellectual reminders are helpful for people that they must continue to believe the truth of Jesus as the Messiah in order to enter into the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, as history has moved along and we are farther from the culture and time of the apostles, the teacher is really more a humble, discussion leader, so that he admits that he needs help in understanding exactly what the apostolic message says and means. In other words, there are no authoritative teachers per se, because there are no teachers who have been taught by a living apostle. Since the 2nd century, we all have been and continue to be utterly dependent on the apostolic documents (and not on senior pastors, for example), so that no one can claim to have the authority to speak about the Bible with any authoritative status. Notice also that Paul separates the function of teacher from the prophet. Probably, he is making a distinction between “prophets,” who taught the Roman Christians from their understanding they acquired from an apostle, even from Paul, and “teachers,” who continue to help Christians remember and learn the full message of the gospel when there are no apostles or prophets around.

³²⁵ εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει ὁ μεταδιδοὺς ἐν ἀπλότῃ, ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ, ὁ ἐλεῶν ἐν ἰλαρότῃ –

4) The fourth role for Christians is that of encouraging others to persevere in their faith. These encouragers have grasped the gospel, but they really enjoy taking it and encouraging others to grasp it likewise and to persevere in believing it in order to enter into the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

5) The fifth role is that of giving, with the means and desire that clearly marks them as suited to this role and function. They are incredibly generous out of their authentic inwardness, this latter part being that which is primarily what God is looking for. Similar is the story of the poor woman who gave her small amount at the temple. The greatness of her gift was not in the quantity but in the quality of her subjectivity.

6) The sixth role and important function within the Christian group is having people who provide care and concern for those who are going through difficult circumstances. But again, it is with genuine inwardness that is characterized by eagerness—not

grumbling or grinding their teeth in resentment for giving up what they think is rightfully only theirs, such as their time. But is this different from what all Christians should be doing? Not really, but these people who are caring for others will be people who publicly lead in this regard, while others follow them in their example.

7) The seventh and final role in Paul's list is being merciful in a cheerful manner. While being merciful in circumstances where the last thing we may want to do is forgive others who have hurt us, we cheerfully grant mercy and forgiveness out a genuine desire to do so because of the mercy which God has granted us. Paul says the same thing in [Ephesian 4:32](#) "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." But how is this any different from what all Christians should do? Probably, Paul is talking about those who publicly lead and encourage others to be forgiving towards those who have hurt them, because they have clearly demonstrated this activity in their own lives, and everyone knows it.

³²⁶ Ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος – Paul now draws the conclusion that Christian love is not scripted or planned or done with the mentality of earning anything from God or manipulating Him into acting on their behalf—like the mentality of Jews who follow the Mosaic Covenant as such or like Christians who do their Christianity within their church as such. Instead, their love flows individually out of the grace of God, in the midst of the function which He has assigned to each Christian, and as Paul goes on to explain in the next paragraph. It is our changed inwardness that prevents our actions on behalf of God from being our acting out a script by which we think we can impress God with our righteousness and obtain His applause and blessings. Yes, He will applaud us, but only and ultimately because of what He has done within us and for us. We are truly existential beings. We exist out of God's causing us to do so, but our choices within our existence are definitely real for the purpose of God's judging them. As a result, He applauds our good choices as Christians who faithfully live out our roles. But in the final analysis, our choices, even our choices to be loving, are brought into existence by God.

Therefore, Paul says that our love in the midst of our God-given functions should never be thought of as just a script we are following as in a play or movie, or as something we are giving to God to earn His blessing. Instead, it is something that God is likewise causing according to His grace.

³²⁷ ἀποστνγούντες τὸ πονηρόν, κολλώμενοι τῷ ἀγαθῷ – Here in this section of 12:9-21, Paul presents his Roman, Christian readers with relatively short pithy statements of what should be the moral quality of their roles, functions, and stories as followers of Jesus as the Messiah. This is what it means for them to be "set apart" and holy, i.e., different from other people in the world who are living according to their hard hearts and unwillingness to seek and follow God.

And Paul describes what this really looks like on a practical level as he segues to a list of commandments (while using present participles, such as ἀποστνγούντες, as imperatives) for all the Romans Christians as to how they are to manifest their belief in Jesus the Messiah. But this list is not exhaustive as we can see from other letters of Paul and the other apostles.

We need to recognize that our problem is not that we do not know what to do and what morality is. All we have to do is examine our own conscience, and it provides plenty of information for what is good vs. evil and how to pursue morality and goodness.

Therefore, our problem is making the commitment to goodness and willfully choosing to do righteousness, which is what Paul is primarily encouraging here as an assumption underlying what he is saying.

The basis of this list is the fact that Jews are returning to Rome and the issues that this will present to these Gentile believers. So the main point is for the Gentile believers to love not only their own ethnic group of Christians, but also their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ, and vice versa—in the midst of their God-given functions, where they need to recognize that none of them, Jew or Gentile, is any greater than anyone else. They are all co-heirs of the grace of the God and looking forward to the eternal Kingdom of God.

The moral qualities of set-apartness are—

1) The first quality is that of hating evil and cling to what is good so that the Christian never lets go of it. This is a general statement that encompasses all that is evil and all that is good. For example, good includes believing that which is true, wanting that which is good, etc. And this exhortation is obviously in the light of our propensity to reject the goodness of God's moral commandments and to embrace the irrational opposite which is clearly evil. We are unwilling to be and do what is good. We prefer evil instead. As a result, we end up condoning evil in ourselves and in others for the sake of our rejecting God. Paul's encouragement to these Roman Christians is to grab onto God's goodness and live their lives according to only it, which will make them set apart and radically different from the rest of the people in the world who do not have changed hearts and who are not being directly influenced within them by God's grace.

³²⁸ τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ εἰς ἀλλήλους φιλόστοργοι, τῇ τιμῇ ἀλλήλους προηγούμενοι –

2) The second quality is that of expressing oneself with biblical love towards other Christians that is characterized by tenderness, understanding, compassion, and humility. There should be a sympathy with all believers because of the common bond of understanding reality the same way and having the mutual hope of the gospel of obtaining the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. It is recognizing that each Christian has the same kind of heart. Similar to 1, 2, & 3 John, it is definitely not hating and rejecting brothers and sisters in Christ, but embracing them despite cultural, doctrinal, ethnic, etc. differences—for example, the ethnic difference of Jews and Gentiles within the Christian community in Rome that is about to occur and the doctrinal differences that have naturally arisen over the last 1900 years because there are no living apostles to guide us perfectly into interpreting the Bible.

3) The third quality is that of leading each other and continually pointing each other towards God, respecting both God and each

person as his own person and individual, with a mind and will of his own, according to each one's level of the maturity of his belief. We should be respecting others and granting them care, attention, proper civil behavior, and even praise that is due them as fellow human beings and, especially, fellow Christians. Again, this is all in the midst of our doctrinal differences, while encouraging each other to use a proper hermeneutical method of pursuing the one and only authorial intent of each passage. And allowing others to be praised for their hard work and righteousness within the Christian community instead of our being acknowledged for such is a key characteristic of authentic belief. A good example is John the Baptist who deferred to Jesus when his disciples noticed that he was getting more attention and drawing larger crowds than John. Another example is Barnabas who recognized the value and role of Paul. Barnabas spoke well of him to the apostles in Jerusalem and obtained his help for serving the new Gentile Christians in Antioch. Paul encourages the Philippians to have the same mindset as Jesus who was willing to look like a common man and not demand to be worshiped as the God-man that he was. He washed his disciples' feet and did not demand they do so towards him before his crucifixion the next day that would rescue them from God's wrath and destruction. Envy of attention that others are getting so easily causes factions within Christian communities. We are even tempted to use slander, expressing something that is negative about others that subtly or not so subtly drives people away from them.

³²⁹ τῇ σπουδῇ μὴ ὀκνηροί. τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντες. τῷ κυρίῳ δουλεύοντες –

4) The fourth quality of being set apart from the world is loving each other diligently and conscientiously as they understand that their good treatment of one another is an act of service to God. They are to be zealous to be God's slaves that begins with their inner beings, their spirits, having a strong, persistent, and committed desire to do so. Thus the energy required to live their lives in the light of the truth requires a conscious and decisive commitment to believe it. It is also easier when people demonstrate genuine interest in the truth and are not complacent. Yawning in each other's faces does not engender real excitement to proclaim the gospel and to teach one another. But Christians need to find their excitement from God and from within them and not on the basis of people's positive response to the gospel and to them. They all need to be excited for themselves and what God is doing inside them, regardless of how people respond to them—whether they enthusiastically embrace the gospel message, appear lukewarm in their response, or violently reject it. This then keeps their belief in God and not in the creation.

³³⁰ τῇ ἐλπίδι χαίροντες. τῇ θλίψει ὑπομένοντες. τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτεροῦντες – Three more key elements in this verse of being set apart and different from the world as Christians—

5) The fifth quality of holiness is rejoicing in the midst of the hope of entering the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. While life's circumstances are going to be arduous and hard, involving even suffering which can come in all sorts of different forms and from all sorts of different directions (persecution by human beings, financial hardship, disease and illness, emotional instability, natural disasters, etc.), Paul would have the Roman Christians express joy in the guaranteed outcome of their lives, their "hope," i.e., eternal life and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God, being confident that what God has promised, He will certainly bring about. Thus, their expectation is in what God will do in the future, not in what He is doing now, except causing them to continue to seek and believe the truth by means of the inner work of His Spirit.

6) The sixth quality is persevering in their belief, even while life seems to be squeezing it out of them by the pressures and problems of this temporary, earthly existence that perhaps lead them to question the goodness of God and to be tempted to abandon their belief in Him.

7) The seventh quality is standing ready and being alert to God's fulfilling His promise of the future Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. And this is in the midst of their hope, difficult circumstances, and expectations that their future in the Kingdom of God has been guaranteed to them by God. Thus, Paul knows that they will express their thoughts and emotions to God in prayer, while they are ready also to follow God wherever He leads them. The plan of their lives is ultimately God's and not theirs.

They need to wait expectantly for God's kingdom to come when God has planned for Jesus to return. And they need to wait expectantly for what He brings them in the next moment and future moments of their present lives.

Prayer is the natural and spontaneous place where they will express what they really desire as Jesus did in Gethsemane and Paul encourages in Philippians 4:4-9. It reveals to God and to themselves what is really going on in their hearts. It is where they really do business with God. And the ultimate business is the same as that of Jesus, to say, "Father, not my will but Yours be done," as he and as they wait for the joy of entering into the actual Kingdom of God.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, indeed, because we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, while laying aside every impediment and the sin that so easily distracts us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 12:2 while fixing our eyes on Jesus, the leader of belief and finisher of his race (τὸν...τελειωτήν), who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, while thinking nothing of the humiliation, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Other English versions translate προσκαρτεροῦντες with the sense that Paul is encouraging devotion or commitment to prayer. But the word means more to stand ready and to be alert in regard to something that is going to happen in the future. For example, **Mark 3:9** Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him (προσκαρτερῆ αὐτῷ), to keep the people from crowding him.

Therefore, it makes more sense to interpret Paul as encouraging the Roman, Gentile Christians to be alert in the midst of prayer to what the gospel promises them, the eternal Kingdom of God. Prayer is a given. In other words, try to be a Christian and stay alert to the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of God and NOT pray. Impossible. Thus, the alert Christian is waiting by faith expectantly for the Kingdom of God and naturally praying at the same time.

³³¹ ταῖς χρείαις τῶν ἁγίων κοινωνοῦντες, τὴν φιλοξενίαν διώκοντες – Two more moral qualities in this verse for Christians –
8) Wherever they see other Christians in need, Paul wants them to participate in those needs by helping to meet them. We can suppose that the “needs” are either physical, or emotional, or psychological, or spiritual. Christians are simply “needs” responders as part of the way that they demonstrate God’s having met their need for His grace, mercy, and salvation.
9) Caring for the needs of others includes the lodging and feeding of out-of-towners—even Jewish believers who are returning to Rome and who might need a place to stay until they can find a permanent residence, and this even if the Jewish believers differ from the Gentile, Roman Christians in their understanding of the gospel—regarding exactly how to use the Mosaic Covenant in their lives, as Paul will describe in more detail in Romans 14 & 15.

³³² εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς διώκοντας ὑμᾶς, εὐλογεῖτε καὶ μὴ καταρᾶσθε – Another moral quality of a Christian –
10) Part of being set apart from the world is to love our enemies in the midst of their hostility and mistreatment of us. If people are persecuting us (notice the use of the same Greek verb as “pursue” in the previous verse (διώκοντες vs. διώκοντας)) for our strange belief in the Jewish Messiah and the Jewish God, the one true God (which is exactly what the whole Bible predicts), then Christians should fundamentally want the best for their persecutors as God has done the best for them, which is that God has opened their eyes and granted them genuine repentance, belief, and eternal mercy and life. This perspective and treatment towards one’s enemies would be in contrast to the natural response of wanting them to suffer and be cursed and condemned eternally by God.
Besides persevering in belief in God in the midst of the most difficult situations in this life, there may be nothing that is harder to do than to love one’s enemies by wanting God’s grace and mercy for them.

³³³ χαίρειν μετὰ χαϊρόντων, κλαίειν μετὰ κλαιόντων – Another important moral quality for Christians to demonstrate as a result of experiencing the mercies of God –
11) Empathy and compassion are such valuable gifts that we give to people depending on their emotional state. If they are ebullient and happy and laughing their heads off, they appreciate it when another person is happy and laughs with them. If they are sad and disappointed and they are grieving by weeping uncontrollably, they appreciate it when another person is willing either to just sit with them or even weep with them, because the person feels for them in their sadness and grief. Consequently, Paul wants his readers to be genuinely compassionate and sympathetic, i.e., feeling with those who are experiencing either positive feelings because of enjoyable circumstances or negative feelings because of painful circumstances—even, I guess, if the ones weeping are their enemies. In so doing, they demonstrate their willingness to “love” other human beings as God has loved us by being so gracious to us to reconcile us to Himself in spite of our being His enemies.
Each Christian is different and has a different capacity to feel with others, so that this exhortation by Paul is for us all to work at doing so as much as possible, i.e., as much as God through His grace causes us.

³³⁴ τὸ αὐτὸ εἰς ἀλλήλους φρονοῦντες, μὴ τὰ ὑψηλὰ φρονοῦντες ἀλλὰ τοῖς ταπεινοῖς συναπαγόμενοι. μὴ γίνεσθε φρόνιμοι παρ’ ἑαυτοῖς – Another important moral quality for Christians –
12) As Paul implied in 12:3, he exhorts his readers to treat all other human beings equally in their speech and actions, meaning that they recognize that other people are no less important and valuable as existing individuals as they are, because everyone has been created by God for the role that He has established for each one.
In addition, each Christian is such primarily because of the work of the grace of God within him. No Christian is therefore more valuable than another, because it is God who has made each one what He wants him to be. Paul thus wants the Roman Christians to realize that they all stand equally saved and acceptable before God by virtue of their belief in His Messiah. Therefore, they should treat each other with equal deference and respect.
Paul directs these believers “not to set [their mind] on lofty things” (neuter plural, and therefore probably not referring to people, even though it could), “but” instead he wants them to “be carried away by humble things” (again, probably neuter and not masculine), meaning not to set their minds on the stuff of this world that their culture considers most important for people being able to feel good about themselves and even superior to others who do not have what they have—status, money, fame, skill, popularity, etc. Paul exhorts them to be carried away in their minds and hearts by the humble things of their existence, which would be God’s sovereign and independent grace, whereby He has independently saved them from His wrath, condemnation, and punishment of eternal destruction. This, in turn, will keep them humble in their manner and treatment of their fellow Christians—and of other human beings who are not Christians.
For example, if one of them has greater knowledge or firmer belief, he should think that this gives him greater status before God and other Christians. Instead, each Christian should focus on the very humbling aspect of Christianity—the fact that they are all morally wretched and evil sinners, who have equally needed and obtained God’s independent grace that has changed their subjectivity and rescued them from His wrath and condemnation. In this way, while they may be wise, they are not such in their own eyes because of something which they have done apart from God’s grace.
Plus, the implication here is that these Roman Christians should not associate with only people who might provide them with any kind of advantage in this life, whether financial, social, or political. They should associate equally with the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble, the famous and the obscure, the popular and the unpopular, etc.
It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of understanding the concept of God’s grace as that which God does that causes what sinners do in the midst of their becoming Christians and living out their Christian lives. His primary causation through both His divine determinism and the operation of His grace within sinners in their subjectivity is THE key to grasping the nature of

our reality as His creatures.

³³⁵ μηδενὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδιδόντες, προνοοῦμενοι καλὰ ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνθρώπων – Another important quality – 13) Paul wants them to reserve vengeance as something which God will handle—at the final judgment (and in the meantime, too, as he will explain in chapter 13 regarding the role of government). It is God’s responsibility to render judgment in regard to all human beings and the choices they make during their existences on this earth. It is the Roman Christians’ (and all other Christians’) responsibility to be as merciful and as kind as possible to those who commit evil towards them, hurt them, and cause them to suffer. As they live their lives in the presence of all men, they stay focused on what God defines as good and right—as Paul has explained in 12:2-16. People of this age are so quick to demand justice and punishment without any regard to God and His future justice and punishment. This is only natural, though, given both the sense of justice that God has imparted to all human beings and our sin that automatically and spontaneously leads us to want to hurt those who hurt us. However, Paul wants his encouragement towards a “set apart” life to be the guiding light for the actions of these Roman Christians.

There are two options for how to interpret the phrase “before all men” (ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνθρώπων)—

1) They should consider what all human beings know what is good vs. evil, and pursue the good that they all know.

2) They should pursue what God considers good regardless of how other people define good and evil.

I think that #2 makes more sense in the light of the context, starting with Paul’s exhortation in 12:2 not to “be conformed to this age.” Regardless of how other people define good, Paul wants these Christians to define it only the way God does and to live according to this definition at all times and in every situation, i.e., “before all men.”

³³⁶ εἰ δυνατόν τὸ ἐξ ὑμῶν, μετὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰρηνεύοντες – It is not always possible, but Paul wants the Romans to maintain good relationships with all people. In other words, he wants them to avoid provoking them to anger and evil as much as possible. They should avoid any unnecessary actions that would do so.

But being at peace with them may mean not choosing to associate with them in order to avoid their bullying and mistreatment. And it may be impossible to avoid all unnecessary words or actions that people will react to with anger. Expressing truth is sometimes more important than avoid conflict with others, but, of course, it should always be done graciously, humbly, and gently.

³³⁷ μὴ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες, ἀγαπητοί, ἀλλὰ δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ, γέγραπται γάρ· ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω, λέγει κύριος – Again, God is the ultimate avenger of all wrongs perpetrated by human beings towards others and exacts the appropriate punishment on them, which is ultimately a time of suffering for the wrong doing and then complete destruction. God will right every wrong through either His justice or His mercy, both of which we will find satisfying in the final analysis. To bolster his point, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:35—

Deuteronomy 32:35 ‘Vengeance is Mine, and retribution (מִן־יְהוָה הַנִּקְמָה לַיּוֹם) (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐκδικήσεως ἀνταποδώσω); in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them.’

At this point in Moses’ song in Deuteronomy 32, God is declaring that He will punish any people who harm His chosen people, the nation of Israel, even though He will use the former for His own sovereign purposes. In other words, to choose to be an enemy of the God’s people, the Jews, is to become an enemy of God at the same time. Therefore, generally speaking, God will bring about justice and punishment whenever it becomes appropriate, especially at the final judgment. which is why Paul can exhort his Roman Christian readers not to “avenge” themselves (μὴ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες), but to “leave room for the wrath” of God (ἀλλὰ δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ).

This should be very comforting for all Christians who have experienced any kind of mistreatment by others. No suffering or pain immorally caused by unbelievers towards believers will go unpunished by God. He avenged the suffering of the Israelites by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and He will avenge the suffering that Christians undergo by non-Christians.

³³⁸ ἀλλὰ ἐὰν πεινᾷ ὁ ἐχθρὸς σου, ψώμιζε αὐτόν· ἐὰν διψᾷ, πότιζε αὐτόν· τοῦτο γὰρ ποιῶν ἄνθρακας πρὸς σωρεύσεις ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ – Paul then quotes Proverbs 25:22,22. There are two options for how to interpret this passage—

1) Be good and kind to your enemies in order to bring about the change of repentance and humility within them. This is how you conquer evil.

2) Be good and kind to your enemies that is a precursor to God’s wrath and destruction of them. This is how you conquer evil. You leave it up to God in His final judgment of them.

The context seems to me to lead in the direction of #2. The “burning coals of fire on his [the enemy’s] head” is a reference to destruction, not to contrition and repentance, if the person persists in being unwilling to submit to God’s truth of exhorting repentance and the pursuit of goodness and not evil. In other words, the Christian’s kindness towards his enemy is a clear sign that God has not only changed this person’s heart but will bring vengeance on his enemy as Paul has quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35.

³³⁹ μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ ἀλλὰ νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν – It will be a battle, but Paul maintains that goodness will win in the end and that Christians should pursue doing what is good and right in the midst of evil in order to align themselves with God as He moves history towards the culmination of His justice in destroying both evil and those who remain committed to evil. Thus, Christians choose not to “be conquered by evil” (μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ) but to look forward to the final time when God will pay evil back for what it deserves—His wrath, condemnation, punishment, and eventual destruction, so that He conquers evil

forever. This will be the result of the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 and will be the manner in which Christians “conquer evil with good” (νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν). They do not really do the conquering. God does. But this is the point. He is always the conqueror of people, either by changing their hearts during their lives in this existence, or by destroying them as a result of the final judgment.

This is also similar to Romans 2, that Christians’ enemies will be storing up wrath for themselves in the day of the wrath and judgment of God. Evil needs to be destroyed, and we need to embrace this fact and that God will bring it about in due time—in His time! So our sentiments for vengeance are good, but our individually acting on them is wrong. We need to let God be the final judge when He sees fit. Our biblical response to an unbeliever who is hurting us is to treat them with grace, mercy, kindness, and patience as much as possible until God judges and condemns them—unless He changes their hearts and He forgives them in the meantime!

³⁴⁰ Πᾶσα ψυχή ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὐσαὶ ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν – Speaking of God’s avenging the suffering that Christians experience from others, Paul describes a tool of God’s vengeance, human governments that are nevertheless comprised of sinful human beings. In the light of their new theology, should these Roman Christians ever obey the emperor and his governmental servants?

It is important to take into account both the textual and the historical contexts of Paul’s instructions about the Roman government.

The textual context is that he is answering the question, “What is the holy way to live life as a Christian in the Roman Empire at that time of history?” Therefore, he is not providing a political theory in this passage even though there is some of this in it.

The historical context is that Jews wrestled with the question, “How should we respond to pagan and secular governments who rule over us in the light of God’s requiring that we submit to Him only by our being under the Mosaic Covenant?” and Gentiles were going to wrestle with the question of how to submit to an earthly “king,” Caesar, in the light of their looking forward to being ruled by God’s “king,” Jesus when he returned.

The Herodians answered these second questions by supporting Herod, the client king of Rome in Judea and Galilee, unequivocally, probably because it brought them power, influence, and wealth—which at least 95% of political leaders pursue.

The Zealots answered these questions by claiming it was idolatrous to submit to Rome and even pay taxes.

The subgroup of Zealots known as the Sicarii took this to the extreme and exercised terrorism whenever they could and assassinated Roman soldiers and officials whenever possible.

The Pharisees as a subgroup of Zealots rationalized submitting to Rome and paying taxes, just as they rationalized a lot of things that were obviously or not so obviously in violation of the Mosaic Covenant. The Pharisees along with the Herodians asked Jesus if it was morally right for them to pay taxes to Caesar (Rome) or not. His response was to “render [pay back, give] to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” In other words, it is good to support even pagan and secular governments who rule over you up to the point where they would require your very soul, worship, allegiance, and obedience as the only god. Then a true believer must follow God’s directives and not the government’s. Paul in Romans 13 is saying the same thing.

The question that Paul is therefore answering is not, “Should I never disobey the government?” Even though this is what it sounds as though he is doing with the answer being No. The question he is answering is, “Should I ever obey the government, because it is neither God Himself nor Jesus, His proxy?” And the answer is, Yes, with Paul’s implying what Jesus said, up to the point where the government asks you to give it the worship, etc. that only God deserves.

The Roman government was no group of saints. Often government officials and their proxies, the Roman military, could be harsh, cruel, and capricious in their treatment of the populace regardless of their ethnic, political, or religious affiliation. So Paul is certainly not implying that the Roman government was always right and in line with good, moral, biblical principles. His language may seem to indicate differently, but all he is saying is, all things being equal, it is holy and right for followers of the ultimate King, God and His proxy, Jesus of Nazareth, to obey and submit to sinful human governments as put in place by the transcendent source of all created reality and the author of this story which He is telling. God has truly “established” (τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν) every government. They are there and have been established “by God” (ὑπὸ θεοῦ). But Paul and the rest of the Bible do not provide three easy steps to figuring out when it is appropriate to say Yes to a government or No to the same government. They provide only the principles to make a person wise to think this through for himself in his own specific situation and set of circumstances.

It is also important to realize that Paul was writing in the context of the Roman government and not our own constitutional, democratic republic. We all are supposed to be the government, so that there is not a ruling elite, an oligarchy (=rule by the few). So when is it right to say Yes or No to ourselves is the question we have to ask?

Because the Roman Christians have submitted themselves to a new and future king, Jesus of Nazareth, when he returns to restore the Davidic Kingdom and to rule the entire world, Paul feels it necessary to instruct them in how they should live under the rule of the Roman Caesar and his deputies. In a few words, they should obey them as that which constitutes holiness as Christians, while they wait for Jesus to establish his rule over the land of Israel and the earth. Indeed, all governing authorities are in their place by the sovereign and determinative will of God as merely stepping stones towards the final Messianic government of Jesus. They exist because God wants them to exist, and if He wants to remove the current officials from their positions and put others in their place, then He will. He thus grants governing officials the power and right to rule for a time, i.e., for His sovereignly chosen amount of time, so that people who are pursuing holiness as believers in Jesus should obey them—to the point where they are not worshipping them and granting them ultimate authority in their lives. Therefore, Christians do not have to fight for every official

to remain in power, as if this is what Paul means. But in our country, we have the right to work to remove them and put others in their place. But this, too, will be only according to God's sovereign and determinative will.

Also, Paul obviously would want his readers to understand that this command of his pertains to only when that which is biblically moral is upheld by the existing government. If a government defines goodness as that which is actually evil and evil as that which is actually good, then of course no biblical Christian can obey such a government in those cases. For example, the Sanhedrin first ordered and manipulated the murder of Jews, and second, they ordered Peter and John to stop preaching the gospel when God had ordered them to do so. No one should have supported the Sanhedrin in either decision or command/directive, so that Peter told them that he had to defy their order and obey God instead—come what may.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed (ἀκούειν) to you rather than to God, you be the judge; **20** for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

³⁴¹ ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθεστήκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται – Because governments exist at the will of God, Paul says that to oppose any goodness which a government prescribes is to oppose God Himself.

There are two options for interpreting the “condemnation” the people bring upon themselves (ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται) for their opposing the authority of God's established government—

1) Temporal and earthly condemnation and punishment by the government itself for the earthly opposition to the government, which, of course, is quite obvious.

2) Eternal condemnation and destruction by God for the complete unbelief and lack of changed inwardness by a non-Christian, which may not be so obvious or at least acknowledged by the non-believer.

The context that includes the ensuing verses through v. 7 would seem to point in the direction of #1, that it is good and right for a human government that is comprised of sinners to punish those who violate its laws that properly define goodness and evil. Thus, a Christian should not disobey his government, because it exists “by God” and should and will condemn and punish such a person. And Paul is implying that it is right for the government to do so as he goes on to explain.

However, the less than obvious condemnation of #2 would be of more concern to Paul as an apostle of the gospel of eternal salvation to Gentiles. I tend to lean in this direction in spite of Paul's comments that follow this verse, because he is so emphatic about the fact that governments exist because of God and not because of man. Or maybe #1 really is more coherent.

³⁴² οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν· τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς – Here Paul explicitly states what was implied in v. 1, that the laws of any government should encourage even biblical goodness and punish biblical evil, in which case this very human government of the Roman Empire (and, by extrapolation, all other human governments) that is not the government of Jesus should be obeyed by Christians and, as a result, approves of Christians' doing so (or should do so!). Just because God and Jesus are not yet directly ruling over Christians does not mean that they should have no fear of and respect for immediate, human authority. Again, because the government is established by God and an instrument of the sovereign God who wants it there, to fear it is to fear God—up to the point when the government chooses to think of itself as the only god and defines good as evil and evil as good. This would obviously pertain mainly to when a government outlaws Christianity. Then we can and must say, “No.”

Thus, Paul says explicitly that “rulers” are “a cause of fear...with respect to evil behavior” (εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ). And would these Christians really want to have “no fear of authority” (μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν) among themselves as if it is ok never to obey governments of sinful human beings? And so he encourages them to “do good” (τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ) in order to “have praise” and affirmation “from the same authority” (ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς).

³⁴³ θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι – Because good governments ultimately owe their existence to God and His sovereign plans, they serve God for the purpose of promoting good on earth (θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν). In addition, they exist to punish “the one who practices evil” (τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι) for as “an avenger” (ἔκδικος) of God “for the purpose of wrath” (εἰς ὀργὴν), which is to say for the purpose of being an instrument of His wrath and His expressing it within the created reality before the final judgment of Revelation 20. As a result, if a Christian were to disobey his government (because it is not the government *per se* of Jesus), then the Christian can expect nothing but the justice, judgment, and punishment of and by the government. Indeed, just as God's wrath will be displayed at the final judgment towards those who are committed to evil, so also the government with its source in God's divine determinism and purposes displays God's wrath on earth in the temporary realm. By doing so, it is God's avenging servant (διάκονός... ἔκδικος), administering justice.

Is Paul sanctioning capital punishment by mentioning a “sword,” or is this strictly metaphorical for punishment? Probably the former, because the Mosaic Covenant sanctioned capital punishment. And indeed, it is even carried out in OT Israel on occasion.

³⁴⁴ διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν – Paul says that biblical ethics definitely involve an element of oughtness. Because it is God who has established all human governments for His sovereign purposes, and because their role in human history is to encourage good behavior and to punish evil behavior (to the extent that they actually promote biblical goodness, given their personnel are sinful human beings), the Roman Christians are morally obligated (“it is necessary” (ἀνάγκη)) “to be subordinate to it” (ὑποτάσσεσθαι). And this is “not only on account of wrath” (οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν) and incurring punishment from the government, but also “on account of understanding” (διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν), i.e.,

because Christians know and understand from the gospel what good behavior actually is in contrast to evil.

There should be the fear of the wrath of God and the human government which He has established in a person's country, and there should be the sense of moral obligation which a Christian feels within himself, both of which should lead him to do the right thing and avoid the punishment of his government—even though his government is not currently headed by Jesus who will rule the restored Kingdom of Israel and the entire world after his second coming.

³⁴⁵ διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε· λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσιν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες – As a result, Paul says that the financial support of, the granting respect for, and the honoring of people who exercise authority by working within the government (“they”) is a moral obligation of a Christian by paying taxes (φόρους τελεῖτε). Government officials are “servants of God,” and they “stand ready” (προσκαρτεροῦντες) to serve in this way in order to carry out their proper role (“for this very thing” (εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο)), the one that God has given them and established for them.

In other words, the general populace show their respect for God (even if they are atheists) by financially supporting His government officials through their paying taxes. Likewise, Christians are not denying God by doing so. They are rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and they are still rendering unto God what is God's.

³⁴⁶ ἀπόδοτε πᾶσιν τὰς ὀφειλάς, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν – By seeing the people who work in the government as God's servants, the Christian is able to “render” (ἀπόδοτε), give back, and grant money (τὸν φόρον), “support” (τὸ τέλος), “respect” (τὸν φόβον = fear), deference, obedience, and “honor” (τὴν τιμὴν) to them. In this way, he is serving God also.

Paul does not offer any guidance on what to do when taxes are exorbitant and government officials abuse their power and authority. He is simply saying that, in general, it is good and right for Christians to submit to and support human governments because of their role in keeping the peace and providing citizens with a social and political context in which to live their lives without dying unnecessarily through other's criminal activities (!) and hopefully come to authentic faith and belief in God.

³⁴⁷ μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν· ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν – The bottom line for how Christians live a life of holiness and being set apart from the world and its cultures that reject God is for them to be only loving towards others, whether the others are their fellow Christians or are just their fellow sinful human beings, regardless of their role in history as God is directing them as clay pots on His potter's wheel (see Romans 9). This is what Christians “owe” to all other human beings and especially to their fellow Christians (μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν).

If money and honor are owed to government officials because their role is to serve God in the Roman government (even if they do not acknowledge that they do), then Paul indicates that it stands to reason that love is owed by Christians to them—as well as to their fellow Christians, and indeed to all other human beings as fellow sinners who desperately need the grace and mercy of God through the Messiah in order to escape His wrath and condemnation.

In addition, while Jews may hold to the perspective that properly fulfilling the Mosaic Covenant requires performing all 613 commandments, including the ritual and ceremonial requirements, Paul is saying that love in regard to one's fellow Christians and fellow human beings suffices to fulfill the covenant (νόμον πεπλήρωκεν). In other words, being a person who is holy and set apart from the world by properly pursuing obedience to God does not require being Jewish. It requires only being loving towards one's fellow Christians and other human beings.

See [Isaiah 58:5](#): “Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to Yahweh? 6 Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Thus, a proper understanding of the rituals such as fasting in the Mosaic Covenant is to see them as ultimately fulfilled in loving others from a place of biblical inwardness and faith, not in actually performing the rituals.

Another striking feature of what Paul is saying here is that the Mosaic Covenant includes the commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind. But he is also saying that loving God is fulfilled by obeying the commandment to love one's neighbor, because a Christian cannot really do the latter without doing the former. Loving his neighbor implies that he is already loving God.

See [Matthew 22:39](#): “The second [commandment] is like (ὁμοία = similar in importance) it [the first and greatest commandment], ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

See [John 4:23](#): “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” This statement by Jesus makes rituals and ceremonies, along with the temple, much, much less significant than authentic inwardness and love for one's fellow Christians and fellow human beings. Therefore, not all the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant are equally valuable. Some are universal and eternal, while the rest are provisional and temporary. And, besides, it is a person's inwardness that is most important, because without the Holy Spirit's having changed a sinner's heart, his acts of love and kindness are not genuinely biblical and acceptable by God.

³⁴⁸ τὸ γὰρ οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ φονεύσεις, οὐ κλέψεις, οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, καὶ εἴ τις ἕτέρα ἐντολή, ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται ἐν τῷ ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν – Paul sums up this obligation of love for the Roman Christians to each other and to all other human beings by quoting Exodus 20:13-17 and Leviticus 19:18, which contain the four

commandments regarding human relationships and the one commandment for Jews to love their neighbors, i.e., their fellow Jews. For Paul, these are a summary of loving other people in need as one would want to love himself in the same need—by meeting the need.

Also, the “neighbor” of Leviticus 19:18 is the Jew’s fellow Jew, who is also living properly under the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the “neighbor” of any Roman Christian is his fellow Christian who is living properly within his belief in Jesus and as a result of his having a heart that has been changed by the Spirit of God. Yet, it makes sense, too, that the moral obligation to love extends beyond the group of Christians to all other sinful human beings, where the definition of love is to do that which is most beneficial for another person and their encountering and embracing the truth of the good news of God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness through Jesus the Messiah.

It is important to recognize that “any other commandment” includes [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one! 5 You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Theologically, therefore, Christians’ loving their fellow Christians and other sinful human beings is a fulfillment of the [Mosaic Covenant](#), which many Jews believe should be the center of attention for all human beings anyway! And Paul is saying that love by a Christian is how both Jews and Gentiles live out the Mosaic Covenant appropriately and fully, because the commandment to love is a universal and eternal one. So Gentile Christians, who are authentically loving their fellow believers and other sinful human beings, do in a sense pay attention to and fulfill the Mosaic Covenant, even more so than Jews who are focused on the outward rituals and ceremonies and miss the point about the circumcision of the heart and the fundamental definition of love. See [Romans 2:13](#) for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,...

So Gentiles are justified before God by believing in Jesus as their crucified Messiah and by fulfilling the Mosaic Covenant through their inward, changed hearts and pursuing obedience to the universal, moral commandments of the covenant of which everyone is naturally aware by how God has made our minds to work (see [Romans 1:28](#) And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.)!! See also [Luke 10:25-37](#) and the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

³⁴⁹ ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη – Paul concludes this brief but powerful exhortation to love especially the Roman Christians’ fellow believers and all others by reminding them that evil (κακὸν) is the very opposite of goodness. Evil, that is opposite to God’s moral commandments, is something their fellow human beings should never experience from them as Christians. Plus, he repeats that love is the overarching umbrella of the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, and therefore of the entire OT Torah, which obviously starts with God’s love for sinful human beings overall by providing them with food, shelter, etc. and for those whom He has predestined to receive His eternal mercy. Then the OT instruction segues to human beings’ love for God and finally arrives at human beings’ love for other human beings as that which is the fulfillment of all the instructions and commandments of the Old Testament, even the commandment to love God.

³⁵⁰ Καὶ τοῦτο εἰδότες τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι ὥρα ἤδη ὑμᾶς ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι, νῦν γὰρ ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἡ σωτηρία ἢ ὅτε ἐπιστεύσαμεν – Two options for what Paul means—

1) He is emphasizing the “nearness” of Jesus’ return to encourage the Roman Christians to avoid their sin that comes from a false view of reality, even though his return may still be a rather long way off.

2) He is encouraging his readers to view their salvation as something which begins at this very moment, because they believed that their salvation would certainly take place when Jesus returns, which also means that their salvation can be described as their current sanctification, i.e., their “salvation is nearer” (ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἡ σωτηρία) which manifests itself in their pursuing biblical goodness and morality in their lives before Jesus’ return and in contrast to the world and Roman culture around them.

#2 is more plausible. For one thing, #1 is very obvious, that Jesus’ return is closer in time than when these Gentile, Roman Christians first believed the gospel. Maybe Paul states it explicitly as an encouragement towards moral behavior, but he probably would have used the word “first” before “we believed” if he meant #1. And he states that the “hour” has “already” come for them “to awaken from sleep,” which means that they have transitioned from unbelief to belief, from disobeying God as their fundamental desire to obeying God, and from pursuing immorality to pursuing morality.

Plus, he has already mentioned the sins of 13:13 in the initial list of moral pursuits in 12:10-16 and now is doing so to emphasize them as what to avoid if one is claiming to want eternal salvation from God. These Christians may be tempted to think that by virtue of their belief in Jesus and his return, they are set and can live whatever kind of life they want, even one that includes sin—and get away with it. But Paul is saying, No. A life that condones drunkenness, sexual sin, and gratifying every sensual feeling for the sake of pleasure is not one that is taking eternal salvation seriously.

Thus, Paul wants his readers to pursue “this” (τοῦτο), i.e., all that he has mentioned so far about a holy life that is different from people in the world. To be asleep is to be in a state of unbelief and unaware of the important truths that God provides for how to live a “holy” life. Paul is declaring unequivocally that now is the time to move from a life of unbelief and immorality to a life of

belief by taking morality seriously. Therefore, he wants the to be even more mindful and intentional in regard to their doing what is good and right, because this kind of being most interested in “salvation” is “nearer” by virtue of their understanding the gospel better.

³⁵¹ ἡ νύξ προέκοψεν. ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν. ἀποθώμεθα οὖν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους, ἐνδυσώμεθα δὲ τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός – Here Paul uses the analogy of night to refer to the period of time when the world is dominated by sin and rebellion against God while the day of righteousness is actually now (ἤγγικεν = literally “has come near” and is therefore present), even though Jesus’ return has not occurred yet. As a result, Paul urges his readers to forego (“lay aside” (ἀποθώμεθα)) evil that comes from having a false view of reality, i.e., the “works of darkness” (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους), and instead take up their armor and “weapons of light” (τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός) (à la Ephesians 6), truth, and biblical goodness to fight against evil in their lives and the lives of others as he has described in this letter. This is why it is so important to know our Bibles!

He also uses OT language of taking off and putting on clothing (ἀποθώμεθα and ἐνδυσώμεθα) as representative of the process that people regarding their internal commitments. They take off the commitment to disobeying God and put on the commitment to obeying Him. But Paul has been clear that this change can take place only as a result of God’s circumcising a sinner’s heart.

³⁵² ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ κόμοις καὶ μέθαις, μὴ κοίταις καὶ ἀσελγείαις, μὴ ἔριδι καὶ ζήλῳ – Here Paul is explicit that the Roman Christians are called to live as though their whole environment is characterized by truth (“in the day” (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ))—even if the rest of the world is not acknowledging the truth and committed to lies and false ideas. These Christians should live “properly” (εὐσχημόνως), as though they are fully saved and in the millennial kingdom or the restored Kingdom of Israel, even though they are not yet.

The upshot of rejecting evil and embracing biblical truth and goodness is to act in a manner commensurate with Christianity and moral purity, that eschews alcoholic binges, sexual immorality, gratifying every sensual feeling that cries out to be fulfilled, and being contentious and violent towards one’s fellow Christians and other human beings, much of which comes from being envious of what others have in comparison to what they have.

Rather, Christians are to be content with what God has provided them. Therefore, being envious and competing with everyone else by bringing them down to get honor and glory from other human beings is a sensual pleasure of the flesh and not in line with God’s moral commandments.

³⁵³ ἀλλὰ ἐνδύσασθε τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιήσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίαις – Paul exhorts his readers to clothe themselves (ἐνδύσασθε) with the truth of the gospel of Jesus (τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν as a metonymy), who is their “Lord” and therefore their master, so that he is the one whom they are serving and will serve within the creation for all eternity. Therefore, they are to act as Jesus would have them act as his subjects—with moral purity, goodness, and love for God, for each other, and for all human beings with whom they come in contact.

This is to put him on as clothing, armor, and weaponry. Meanwhile, the deepest level of a moral nature within human beings, their “flesh,” which is fundamentally hostile to God and His truth and remains such throughout even a Christian’s whole life (see chapters 7 & 8), will constantly push the Christian towards the fulfilling of its strong desires (εἰς ἐπιθυμίας) of immorality and evil, which should be resisted with every fiber of his being by the grace of God and through knowing the truth of God. Thus, they should “make no plans for the flesh” (τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιήσθε).

A life of sanctified (set apart) pursuit of goodness and morality is not optional for Christians. It is mandatory, because it is part of what it means to be saved even now before Jesus returns. The salvation is not complete, but it is in process and on its way to life and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God.

³⁵⁴ Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει προσλαμβάνεσθε, μὴ εἰς διακρίσεις διαλογισμῶν – Speaking of love for one’s fellow Christians being the “fulfillment” (see 13:10) and fullness of the Mosaic Covenant, so that it is of the highest priority after first loving God, Paul instructs the Roman Christians at some length on an immediate and practical issue in their lives. After the Gentile Christians in Rome read this letter, it is entirely possible that they will now understand the gospel better than so many other Christians, including Jewish Christians, who are still struggling with how to relate to God in the light of their national obligation to the Mosaic Covenant, especially to the religious practices delineated in the Covenant such as eating kosher. Therefore, these Roman Gentile Christians could easily, in the newness of their faith, look down on and consider themselves superior to Jewish Christians who do not grasp the significance of the gospel as well as they do—because the Jews are “weak in their belief” (Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει), meaning that they have a faulty belief system with respect to ritual and ceremonial commandments in the Covenant. They are on the right track with their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, but they are on the wrong track with their continued obsession with the Mosaic Covenant and its ritual commandments, as if both are necessary to obtain God’s salvation. And Paul wants to nip the problem of the Gentile Christians’ thinking that they are superior in the bud. Therefore, he encourages the Gentile Christians to “accept” (προσλαμβάνεσθε) and embrace their Jewish brothers in Christ even though they know the latter’s perspective on the relationship between the gospel and the Mosaic Covenant is wrong. And their acceptance of them should not be “for the purpose of arguing about personal views” (μὴ εἰς διακρίσεις διαλογισμῶν) and immediately correcting their theology by getting into a discussion and argument with them. Love and acceptance under the banner of following the Lord Jesus as Messiah and High Priest are more important than being unified on these particular theological issues, e.g., whether everyone is called to eat kosher.

This discussion by Paul is NOT about moral commandments, because in regard to them, both the Gentile Christians and Jewish

Christians should have the same strong belief so to speak. This is about ritual and ceremonial commandments, which the Jewish Christians have elevated theologically to the same level as moral commandments. Granted, God criticized the Israelites in the OT for not keeping the Sabbath, but this was more about their hearts and not about their actual practices.

Jeremiah 17:27 “But if you do not listen to Me to keep the sabbath day holy by not carrying a load and coming in through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem and not be quenched.”

³⁵⁵ ὃς μὲν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα, ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν λάχανα ἐσθίει – The person “who is weak” (ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν) in his belief has a faulty belief system. This is the Jewish Christian, who is returning to Rome after being gone for six years. He is looking at the possibility of eating the meat of animals that is available in the city market and realizes that the source of all the meat there is animals which have been offered to the pagan Roman gods. In addition, the meat has not been prepared in a kosher manner, leaving only vegetables (λάχανα ἐσθίει) as food for the Jews to prepare personally in a manner that is in accord with the Mosaic Covenant.

This also means that the person who “believes he can eat all things” (ὃς μὲν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα) is the Gentile Christian, who has read this letter, especially Romans 1-8, and has come to understand that it is belief in the Messiah which saves people, not strict obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, including its offerings, sacrifices, and requirements about, for example, how to prepare and eat food. As a result, all Christians, Gentiles and Jews, have no eternal, salvific obligation to the Mosaic Covenant but only to Jesus as their Lord, king and priest, thus leaving them free to pursue morality completely apart from following the Mosaic Covenant per se.

³⁵⁶ ὁ ἐσθίων τὸν μὴ ἐσθίοντα μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτω, ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐσθίων τὸν ἐσθίοντα μὴ κρινέτω, ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν προσελάβετο – Again, Paul urges the Gentile Christians, who eat anything available (ὁ ἐσθίων) and, with their better and freer understanding of the gospel, not to look down on (“treat with contempt” (μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτω)) Jewish Christians, who have not yet made the complete transition from the Mosaic Covenant (as obeyed within the Jewish culture, not as actually taught by the Bible) to Jesus as their only ground and basis for eternal salvation and mercy, because they will not eat (μὴ ἐσθίοντα) meat sacrificed to idols and false gods—even though all food is just food, as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 8 (see below). Indeed, Paul states explicitly that the Gentile Christian is “accepted” by God (ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν προσελάβετο), even though it looks to the Jewish Christian as if he is violating the Mosaic Covenant so egregiously that he must stand condemned before God. This means, too, that the Jewish Christian, with his poor and limited understanding of the gospel, is equally acceptable to God as the Gentile Christian with his better understanding, thus demonstrating that a person is not saved or justified by the quality or quantity of his known theology, but by his changed subjectivity and inwardness that results in a genuine willingness and desire to believe God, to understand God, and to obey God.

1 Corinthians 8:4 Therefore, concerning eating food that has been sacrificed to pagan gods. We know that there is no god in the created reality, and that there is no God except the One. **8:5** For if, indeed, there are things which are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, just as there are actually many “gods” and many “lords,” **8:6** nevertheless, for us there is the one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him. And there is one Lord, Jesus the Messiah, in light of whom are all things, and we exist in light of him. **8:7** But not all have such understanding. And some, through being previously accustomed to a pagan god, eat as if it is food that has been sacrificed to a pagan god, and their understanding becomes contaminated, because it is weak. **8:8** However, food will not present us to God. We are neither deficient if we do not eat. Nor are we better off if we do eat. **8:9** But be careful lest somehow this right of yours becomes for the weak a stone which makes them trip. **8:10** For if someone sees you, who has knowledge, dining in a pagan god’s temple, will not his understanding, because he is weak, be built up towards eating food which has been sacrificed to pagan gods. **8:11** Then, by means of your understanding, the one who is weak is destroyed, the brother on account of whom the Messiah died. **8:12** And, thus, by sinning against the brothers and assaulting their weak understanding, you are sinning against the Messiah. **8:13** Indeed, if food brings about the downfall of my brother, I will in no way eat meat into the age, so that I do not bring about the downfall of my brother. **9:1** I am not free.

³⁵⁷ σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ κρίνων ἀλλότριον οἰκέτην; τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ στήκει ἢ πίπτει; σταθήσεται δέ, δυνατεὶ γὰρ ὁ κύριος στήσαι αὐτόν – Even though Paul uses only the second verb from the previous sentence, condemn (ὁ κρίνων), it makes sense that he is referring to both the Gentile who arrogantly treats with contempt the Jew and the Jew who arrogantly condemns the Gentile. And the question Paul asks further bolsters his point that looking down on and even thinking that another Christian is unacceptable or even less acceptable to God because he lacks the level of understanding that he has is itself an unacceptable way to think about a fellow Christian. And the reason is that it is because God is the one who is ultimately in control of a Christian’s journey and destiny, thus making it theologically guaranteed both that God will cause the authentic Christian with poor understanding to remain acceptable to Him, even at the final judgment, and that He will cause the authentic Christian who is not concerned about keeping the Mosaic Covenant to do the same.

Both are a “servant who belongs to another” (ἀλλότριον οἰκέτην), and “for [each one’s] master” (τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ) “he stands or falls” (στήκει ἢ πίπτει). Theologically, it is up to the “master,” i.e., Jesus as his “Lord” (ὁ κύριος), as to whether or not a sinner stands before God and receives His blessing and promise of salvation and eternal life. And this is because Jesus has qualified to be the “Lord” of sinners for whom he will intercede before God and appeal to Him for His eternal mercy and be successful in doing so. As a result, Paul says that the sinner who is an authentic believer “will be made to stand, because the “Lord” Jesus is “strong enough” in his interceding ability “to make him stand” (σταθήσεται δέ, δυνατεὶ γὰρ ὁ κύριος στήσαι αὐτόν).

It also demonstrates that Christians will have different levels of understanding on biblical issues, so that they should treat each other with great patience and acceptance in the midst of their theological differences in the midst of God's powerfully causing them to persevere in genuine belief and eventually obtain salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

³⁵⁸ Ὅς μὲν γὰρ κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ' ἡμέραν, ὃς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῦ πληροφορεῖσθω – Paul now segues this same discussion from the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Covenant into its commandment regarding keeping the Sabbath.

The Jewish Christian with poor understanding of the gospel still considers the Sabbath to be a completely different day from the other six days of the week (Ὅς μὲν γὰρ κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ' ἡμέρα)—even with respect to his eternal destiny and acceptance before God.

The Gentile Christian with better understanding realizes that no day is any different from any other day (ὃς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) when it comes to his relationship with God for the sake of his eternal salvation.

Paul indicates that both Christians should be allowed to be where they are in their understanding (ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῦ πληροφορεῖσθω)—without their looking down on one another with contempt or condemning one another for being “wrong” (this being the context of this passage). Paul wants the Christians to allow each other to be fully convinced in his own mind, because this is just how the mental processes work in the midst of seeking truth. Some previously acquired false ideas end up sticking until God dislodges them when He sovereignly wants. And because of this, we can say that no one other than an apostle has an accurate knowledge of biblical theology.

³⁵⁹ ὁ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίῳ φρονεῖ καὶ ὁ ἐσθίων κυρίῳ ἐσθίει, εὐχαριστεῖ γὰρ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ὁ μὴ ἐσθίων κυρίῳ οὐκ ἐσθίει καὶ εὐχαριστεῖ τῷ θεῷ – Paul explicitly says that the Jewish Christian who keeps the Sabbath (ὁ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν) and the Gentile Christian who eats meat that has been sacrificed to idols (καὶ ὁ ἐσθίων) are both doing so “for the Lord” (κυρίῳ) Jesus as a bona fide follower of his, while even giving “thanks to God” (εὐχαριστεῖ γὰρ τῷ θεῷ) as the God of both Jesus, the Son of God, and the sinful human being who is convinced he is following Jesus correctly.

This means that both kinds of Christians are doing what they think is right, so that it is actually right for each of them individually. Therefore, the Jewish Christian who does not eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols restrains himself in this way “for the Lord” Jesus while giving just as much “thanks to God” as the Gentile Christian who will eat this meat. And the Gentile Christian considers everyday to be exactly like all the other days “for the Lord” Jesus while giving just as much “thanks to God” as the Jewish Christian who considers the Sabbath Day to be unique and special in comparison to the other six days of the week. Therefore, both the Jewish Christian and the Gentile Christian honor and obey God as each sees fit—in a proper moral manner, even though they are doing certain “ritual” activities differently. And each of them is doing the right thing as far as God is concerned, even though they disagree with one another on exactly what God requires, and one of them happens to be wrong—because this is not a moral issue *per se*.

³⁶⁰ οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἑαυτῷ ζῆ καὶ οὐδεὶς ἑαυτῷ ἀποθνήσκει – Paul further describes the mentality of each of these Christians as that which is (or at least should be!) true of all Christians, that they include certain things in their lives (“live for himself” (ἑαυτῷ ζῆ)) or exclude these same things (“die for himself” (ἑαυτῷ ἀποθνήσκει)) not because they are thinking mostly of themselves. Instead, each person lives life to its fullest according to his current definition of fullness, i.e., that which he thinks is biblical, obedience to God, which may be a mature definition, that includes eating all things (according to the Gentile Christian), or may be an immature definition, that includes only kosher food (according to the Jewish Christian). But they are doing this for someone else, and the implied person is God ultimately and then Jesus as their “Lord.” They are not doing this for themselves. In other words, they are not being selfish, but obedient *according to their particular understanding of biblical obedience* regarding an issue that is not a moral one. Therefore, in this situation, neither one of them is being immoral. It is simply that one of them is being mature while the other is being immature, which is a different issue.

³⁶¹ ἔάν τε γὰρ ζῶμεν, τῷ κυρίῳ ζῶμεν, ἔάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν, τῷ κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκομεν. ἔάν τε οὖν ζῶμεν ἔάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν, τοῦ κυρίου ἐσμέν – Paul says that Christians include some elements in the creation in their lives (“live” (ἔάν τε γὰρ ζῶμεν)) and exclude other elements of the creation in their lives (“die” (ἔάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν)), because they desire to be obedient to God and His Messiah, Jesus (“live” or “die” “for the Lord” (τῷ κυρίῳ ζῶμεν or τῷ κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκομεν)). They are correctly thinking mostly of God the Father and Jesus, not of themselves. They desire to obey them and not just their own selfish desires. Plus, they realize that they are the very property of Jesus as their “Lord” and therefore want to be respectful of him as their owner. Thus, they “belong to” Jesus (and to God, who sent him), who is their “Lord” (τοῦ κυρίου ἐσμέν). They may end up living life to its fullness correctly, or they may end up dying so to speak to things that are permissible according to God and Jesus, but not according to their current understanding of the gospel. But what really matters is that both the Gentile Christian and the Jewish Christian think that they are living life to its fullness according to God's requirements and allow each other to live life the way they believe it ought to be lived—again, because neither of them is doing anything immoral. And this is what is pleasing to God—not their theological correctness.

³⁶² εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἔζησεν, ἵνα καὶ νεκρῶν καὶ ζώντων κυριεύσῃ – Now Paul states that Jesus died and was raised from the dead to live again (ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἔζησεν) for two kinds of people. First, he died for those with a poor understanding of the gospel who limit themselves in their lives according to the Mosaic Covenant (Jewish Christians), when they

do not have to if they were to understand the gospel correctly. Second, Jesus died for those with a good understanding of the gospel who engage in things in life that go beyond the limits of the Mosaic Covenant but are certainly not immoral *per se*, e.g., eating non-kosher food and not keeping the Sabbath.

And Jesus did these (and God brought them about in His sovereignty) so that he, Jesus, would be the “master” (κυριεύση) “of those who dies and those who live” (νεκρῶν καὶ ζώντων), by which Paul means in this context those who limit themselves in what they do because of a poor understanding of the gospel and those who do not because of a mature understanding. Thus, by dying for both those with an immature understanding of the gospel and those with a mature understanding, Jesus becomes their teacher, leader, and master, i.e., the one who owns them as his slaves in life and eternal life.

³⁶³ Σὺ δὲ τί κρίνεις τὸν ἀδελφόν σου; ἢ καὶ σὺ τί ἐξουθενεῖς τὸν ἀδελφόν σου; πάντες γὰρ παραστησόμεθα τῷ βήματι τοῦ θεοῦ – Reflecting on the same idea as in 14:4, Paul asks, does it really make sense for either a Jew with a poor understanding of the gospel to “condemn” (κρίνεις) his Gentile brother for going beyond the limits of the Mosaic Covenant in regard to preparing and eating food, for example, and for a Gentile with a good understanding of the gospel to look down on (ἐξουθενεῖς) his “stupid” Jewish brother for obeying the Mosaic Covenant and remaining within its ritualistic boundaries?

And the reason why neither of these makes sense is because both kinds of Christians will be acceptable to God at the judgment and receive His eternal mercy. They will all “stand” (παραστησόμεθα) at the judgment in the sense that they will not be eternally condemned by God.

In this context, there are two possibilities for interpreting παραστησόμεθα—

1) We will all stand before God and be judged by Him.

2) We Christians will all stand justified before God regardless of the level of maturity of our understanding of the Bible and the gospel.

I think that Paul means #2, because he wants to communicate to both the Gentile Christian and the Jewish Christian that each one will survive God’s final judgment and truly stand justified before Him, therefore being accepted by Him and granted eternal salvation. Thus, we shall all be made to stand justified and saved by God through Jesus’ intercession, both those with a high level of understanding and those with a low level of understanding of the gospel.

³⁶⁴ γέγραπται γὰρ ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος, ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται τῷ θεῷ – Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23 to the effect that all those who submit in their subjectivity and hearts to God will be welcome by Him. And the implied point is that misunderstanding certain elements of biblical truth that have to do with the Mosaic Covenant does not condemn a person eternally. [And for that matter, misunderstanding certain biblical truths in the NT does not condemn a person eternally either.]

As quoted below, Isaiah 45:22-25 calls all human beings to come to God and be saved from His wrath and condemnation. And eventually those from all the nations who properly approach God for mercy will acknowledge not only God’s sovereignty but also His justice and mercy. Those of genuine belief will truly bow before God and be saved. In addition, God will fulfill His promise to Israel and justify and save them by changing their hearts and granting them the glory of the eternal Kingdom of God. Therefore, with his quote from Isaiah 45:23, Paul confirms that all true believers will find salvation in the Messiah, regardless of the quality of their theology regarding the Mosaic Covenant and the NT gospel—as long as they are humble and not harsh, arrogant, and overly critical like the Jewish “believers” in Galatians.

Isaiah 45:22 “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. **23** I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. **24** They will say of Me, ‘Only in Yahweh are righteousness and strength.’ Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. **25** In Yahweh all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory.”

³⁶⁵ ἄρα οὖν ἕκαστος ἡμῶν περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λόγον δώσει τῷ θεῷ – Another way to state the unacceptability of condemning and criticizing believers in the Jewish Messiah on the basis of the quality of their understanding of the gospel is for Paul to comment that each of us is on his own at the judgment. Even though all authentic believers will be saved at the judgment, they will still be judged by God. This implies that it is our subjectivity which has been changed by God that will be the key object of judgment by Him when the time comes—not the quality and quantity of our theology of the Mosaic Covenant and its religious practices (or the New Covenant and its “practices,” which are NONE).

For example, Abraham had minimal theology compared to Moses and the apostles, and Moses says in Genesis 15:6 that he was justified as a result of his “belief,” which, by definition, emanated from his changed subjectivity and heart. Also, the quality of the theology of every Christian since the apostles is relatively poor compared to them. Indeed, no one has had as good a grasp (a perfect grasp!) on the biblical message as Jesus and the apostles. This is another reason why it is so important for all Christians to be very patient and kind towards one another, so that we conduct any discussion of our differences with the utmost humility and love—even granting each other the possibility of a changed heart and therefore leaving it up to God at the judgment to make the final decision about the genuineness of each other’s faith and Christianity.

Paul is therefore saying that “each” (ἕκαστος) person “will give an account (λόγον) of himself to God,” meaning also that each one is responsible for his own story as he has lived it out under the sovereign plan and purpose of God.

³⁶⁶ Μηκέτι οὖν ἀλλήλους κρίνωμεν· ἀλλὰ τοῦτο κρίνατε μᾶλλον, τὸ μὴ τιθέσθαι πρόσκομμα τῷ ἀδελφῷ ἢ σκάνδαλον – Nevertheless, Paul also says that it is important for the people with good understanding of the gospel and Mosaic Covenant to be

careful about extending the limits of their lives beyond that of those with poor understanding. They should not “put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way” (τὸ μὴ τιθέναι πρόσκομμα τῷ ἀδελφῷ ἢ σκάνδαλον). This would be by doing something that a Christian with poorer understanding of Christianity believes is contrary to God’s commandments and therefore sin against God—such as eating meat that has come from animals that were sacrificed to false gods. This would unsettle their fellow Christians in their faith unnecessarily and possibly cause them to lose their faith in God and Jesus as the Messiah.

This also implies that biblical love motivates us not to show just how free we are with respect to rituals and ceremonial practices of the Mosaic Covenant (and any rituals and traditional Christian practices derived from the NT)], but to encourage Jewish (and other) Christians in their faith as patiently as possible, while they become better educated about the essential truth of the Bible—i.e., a changed heart, authentic belief in God and Jesus as the Messiah, and pursuit of biblical moral (not ritual) behavior towards other people.

Also, notice the two meanings of κρίνω — judge/condemn and determine.

³⁶⁷ οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι’ ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκείνῳ κοινόν – Paul, with his excellent grasp of the ideas of the gospel of Jesus as Lord and Messiah by means of his studying the Old Testament, so as to understand the concepts of the Messiah as well as possible and how Jesus is the one who fulfills all predictions of the Messiah, is fully convinced that nothing that the Mosaic Covenant prohibits, such as the wrong food or mold on the wall of one’s house, is “itself” (δι’ ἑαυτοῦ) morally “unclean” (κοινόν).

Nevertheless, if a Christian of changed inwardness and authentic belief truly believes at the moment that food prohibited by the Mosaic Covenant is “unclean,” then “to that person it is unclean” (ἐκείνῳ κοινόν)! This in the midst of the truth that all food is permissible for a Christian to eat (see 1 Corinthians 8). Nevertheless, Paul realizes that his Jewish brother in the Messiah may not have fully understood this yet, so that he considers eating non-kosher food to be an act of disobedience to God and therefore both “unclean” and immoral (sin).

³⁶⁸ εἰ γὰρ διὰ βρώμα ὁ ἀδελφός σου λυπείται, οὐκέτι κατὰ ἀγάπην περιπατεῖς· μὴ τῷ βρώματί σου ἐκείνον ἀπόλλυε ὑπὲρ οὗ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν – The issue here for Paul is not the possibility of causing another Christian to “sin” and do something against his conscience, e.g., to eat meat from an animal that has been sacrificed to pagan gods—as if he just won’t be able to help himself because he has watched someone else “sin.” It is to eat meat from an animal that has been sacrificed to pagan gods in front of him, when he considers it to be immoral towards God, thus making him watch you engage in “immorality” in the midst of your claiming to be a moral person. It is to display, in his opinion, a contradiction in morality. This will obviously emotionally unsettle one’s fellow Christian, which would not happen if he did not have to watch another person “sin.”

In other words, our goal as Christians of loving God and His people is to display goodness before other believers in order to confirm their (and our) commitment to goodness—even if our definitions of goodness are different in relation to the Mosaic Covenant (and religious practices)—*until we can help each other come to a common understanding that is correct*.

And it is vital to recognize that the person whom we are loving is someone for whom Jesus died as the Messiah (ὑπὲρ οὗ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν). If he was willing to sacrifice himself to this extent for our Jewish brother, who lacks good understanding of the gospel, then the least we can do is to behave in such a way that we do not unsettle him emotionally in his faith.

Paul’s command, “Do not destroy…” sounds extreme, as though he is speaking of crushing a fellow believer’s faith. But in the context he is referring to the destruction of the person’s emotional equanimity in the midst of his genuine faith in God. *Unnecessarily* unsettling a fellow believer while engaging in amoral issues (doing or having things that the Mosaic Covenant considers “unclean” but are not actually morally “unclean”) becomes a moral issue if we do so out of arrogance, selfishness, self-righteousness, and a lack of love.

³⁶⁹ μὴ βλασφημείσθω ὡς ὑμῶν τὸ ἀγαθόν – Paul is saying that “the good” (τὸ ἀγαθόν) for the Gentile Christians in Rome (“you” (ὡς ὑμῶν)), e.g., eating anything and everything regardless of its kind or manner of preparation, with a more complete grasp of the implications of the gospel can be the evil for a person with a poor understanding. This “good” of the one with better understanding will “be spoken of as evil” (βλασφημείσθω) by the person with a lack of understanding.

What Paul does not want is for the Christian community to be divided between people who are actually doing good and yet being spoken of as evil by people who consider their good to be evil out of a poor understanding of the gospel. This does not help the overall health of the Christian community. Nor does the division help the overall proclamation of the gospel to the world, because it makes it appear as though unity around Jesus and God’s grace is not as important as disunity on the basis of differences in religious practices. Of course, the latter is exactly what has happened in Christian history with all the factions and denominations that have been created. How unfortunate.

³⁷⁰ οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ βρώσις καὶ πόσις ἀλλὰ δικαιοσύνη καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ χαρὰ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ – And the reason why the kind of food that one is eating should not be high on the agenda of a person with a good understanding of the gospel and Mosaic Covenant is because he should be more concerned about actual goodness and morality in a peaceful and undivided relationship with his fellow Christians while they all rejoice in what God has done through His Spirit in pointing each person towards the fulfillment of His promises and ultimately eternal mercy and life (δικαιοσύνη καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ χαρὰ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ).

The point of the “Kingdom of God” (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) is not “food and drink” (βρώσις καὶ πόσις) (and any other religious practices—whether under the MC or the NC), but true morally good behavior—such as avoiding murder, adultery, stealing, and

envy (as explicitly stated in the Ten Commandments).

³⁷¹ ὁ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ δουλεύων τῷ Χριστῷ εὐάρεστος τῷ θεῷ καὶ δόκιμος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις – The way Paul describes life in the Christian community in the previous verse is what he says actually pleases God (εὐάρεστος τῷ θεῷ). This person is truly serving and being a slave of the Messiah (δουλεύων τῷ Χριστῷ).

In addition to pleasing God, this person is also “providing clear evidence to men” (δόκιμος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) in regard to God, His requirement of His people living morally good lives, and His grace/mercy as that which is behind the belief and all their moral actions.

Other English translations interpret δόκιμος as “approved,” but this does not make sense in the light of Paul’s whole point in this and other letters that the rest of the world is hostile to God and His moral commandments. Therefore, I have translated as I have, that bona fide, biblical moral behavior is nice, clear evidence of God at work for all other people in the world—and if they respond to it well, they themselves will repent and obtain God’s mercy and promise of eternal life. As a result, each person who exercises humility and patience towards other Christians of different religious scruples is truly a slave of the Messiah, who died and will be an advocate before God for both kinds of Christians, is pleasing to God, and a great witness of the existence and requirements of God.

³⁷² Ἄρα οὖν τὰ τῆς εἰρήνης διώκωμεν καὶ τὰ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους – Now that Paul has described how Christians with different levels of understanding of God’s requirements under the gospel of the Messiah should treat each other, i.e., with love, patience, respect, and kindness (with no condemnation or looking down on someone), he repeats this as a general instruction and connects it to the final goal of being a Christian, “shalom” (τῆς εἰρήνης), and to the present goal of “building up one another” (τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους).

In other words, only core, biblical morality is the one, necessary condition from God—

1) to reach eternal life and

2) to help other Christians to mature and persevere in their faith.

Paul says that the main goal is not each one of us living his life exactly according to his understanding of the gospel, but eternal life instead, where I suppose it is implied that no one will lack understanding of these issues—or at least we will work at acquiring a common and correct understanding while treating each other morally perfectly and lovingly. But keeping eternal life and moral perfection in our sights also results in encouraging each other towards this goal as the main goal. And at the same time, a secondary goal is that we work at gaining more understanding of the gospel in order to live life beyond the limits of the Mosaic Covenant (and other religious practices that people invent or incorrectly derive from the New Testament—such as the Lord’s Supper, which was Jesus’ command to only his apostles regarding how to celebrate the Jewish Passover, and baptism, which was a ritual contemporary to only Jesus and the apostles).

³⁷³ μὴ ἔνεκεν βρώματος κατάλυε τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ. πάντα μὲν καθαρὰ, ἀλλὰ κακὸν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τῷ διὰ προσκόμματος ἐσθίοντι – Again, the issue for Paul is not destroying the work of God by eating food (μὴ ἔνεκεν βρώματος κατάλυε τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ), i.e., causing someone to sin against his conscience by eating food in front of him that he considers to be “unclean” and therefore a sin to eat. It is displaying before him what is sin in his mind while claiming to be, like him, someone who is committed to goodness. The Christian with a higher level of understanding about the nature of the Christian life under the gospel of Jesus is doing something that the Christian with a lower level of understanding considers to be disobedient to God, even something as simple as breaking the dietary law of the Mosaic Covenant.

This ends up destroying the cohesiveness of the Christian community and each Christian’s ability to be encouraging his fellow Christians towards the ultimate goal of eternal life, which Paul calls “the work of God” (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ). And it unnecessarily unsettles people emotionally, which Paul calls and “evil” (κακὸν) that is “a stone over which someone trips” and falls (διὰ προσκόμματος), not be losing his faith, but by preventing him from participating in his fellow Christians’ lives in a wholehearted and full way as both pursue righteousness and look forward to entering the Kingdom of God together when Jesus returns. In other words, the “work of God” is His using Christians in each other’s lives to continue to motivate them towards the fulfillment of His promises and eternal life.

But they cannot do this if they do not grant grace and patience to each other in the midst of their different understanding of religious practices under the banner of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and return.

³⁷⁴ καλὸν τὸ μὴ φαγεῖν κρέα μηδὲ πιεῖν οἶνον μηδὲ ἐν ᾧ ὁ ἀδελφός σου προσκόπτει – It is not that drinking wine (πιεῖν οἶνον) is actually an issue in the Roman Christian community, but he is using eating, drinking, and doing anything (μηδὲ ἐν) in a hyperbolic manner, to say that if some religious practice is considered sinful, so that “your brother is offended” (ὁ ἀδελφός σου προσκόπτει) and sincerely and truly thinks that you are engaging in behavior that is disobedient to God, then everyone needs to back off from this practice until the person gains a higher level of understanding of the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah.

Thus, Paul is saying that it is good to stay within the limits of the Christian with the poorest and lowest understanding of the gospel as the means to creating a community of the highest emotional stability with respect to each other’s being a sinner and to remaining unified in looking forward to eternal life and the future Kingdom of God.

³⁷⁵ σὺ πίστιν ἦν ἔχεις κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἔχε ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. μακάριος ὁ μὴ κρίνων ἑαυτὸν ἐν ᾧ δοκιμάζει – Paul is perfectly willing to let people have their correct and incorrect understandings of the implications of the gospel as they stand before God so

to speak (σὺ πίστιν ἦν ἔχεις κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἔχε ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ) as long as they have authentic belief and are willing to treat Christians with different levels of understanding with humility and grace.

If a Christian has a clear conscience with respect to non-moral issues such as kosher food, whether he thinks one ought to eat kosher (the Jew with poor understanding) or he thinks he is free to eat outside the boundaries of the Mosaic Covenant (the Gentile with correct understanding), then he can appropriately be “happy” (μακάριος), and so much the better for this person in the context of the entire community of believers. If he “does not condemn himself in what he finds acceptable” (ὁ μὴ κρίνων ἑαυτὸν ἐν ᾧ δοκιμάζει), then this is where he is in present, spiritual condition and should live there until something changes, such as he gains a clearer and higher understanding of the gospel. Or he should live there because he has a clear and high understanding of the gospel.

Paul is implying that any Christian’s loving, patient, and gracious treatment of his fellow Christians is what counts the most.

³⁷⁶ ὁ δὲ διακρινόμενος ἐὰν φάγη κατακέκριται, ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως· πᾶν δὲ ὁ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν – On the other hand, Paul says that “doubt” (ὁ δὲ διακρινόμενος) and uncertainty about the appropriateness of engaging in certain religious actions of the Mosaic Covenant will make a Christian who does not engage in them feel as though he is being disobedient to God and “condemned” by Him (κατακέκριται), because not doing these things is “part of his belief system” (οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως). Therefore, anything that is not a part of his belief system is sin” (πᾶν δὲ ὁ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν) and immoral—naturally!

So if he does not engage in the religious actions that are the issue at the moment, e.g., eating kosher, then he will feel “condemned” by God, i.e., as though he is committed to immorality and not to righteousness—which, in the final analysis, could result in God’s condemnation if a person’s heart is not right before God.

³⁷⁷ Ὀφειλομεν δὲ ἡμεῖς οἱ δυνατοὶ τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ἀδυνάτων βαστάζειν καὶ μὴ ἑαυτοῖς ἀρέσκειν – Paul as an apostle is certainly one whose understanding of the gospel is as complete and accurate as is humanly possible. He is one of the “capable ones” (οἱ δυνατοὶ), someone with a high level of understanding of the biblical message. However, he is willing to forego living beyond the religious, Mosaic Covenant limits of another believer, if this believer is one of “the incapable ones” (τῶν ἀδυνάτων) and has less understanding than he does and therefore is inaccurate in his grasp of the gospel. This latter person is demonstrating his “weaknesses” (τὰ ἀσθενήματα) by thinking that eating kosher is a required moral action for a believer in Jesus.

But Paul is willing “to bear with the weaknesses” (τὰ ἀσθενήματα...βαστάζειν) of this person and “not just please” himself (μὴ ἑαυτοῖς ἀρέσκειν) for the sake of living out his higher level of understanding of the gospel.

Therefore, not to rein in one’s own actions would be to please oneself at the expense of the moral sensibility with respect to religious issues of other believers, who have less of a grasp of the implications of the gospel. Indeed, it is a moral obligation on each Christian’s part to act lovingly towards his fellow believers by not extending his actions beyond what they understand to be the limitations of the Mosaic Covenant (and the limitations of the invented religious practices within Christendom).

³⁷⁸ ἕκαστος ἑμῶν τῷ πλησίον ἀρεσκέτω εἰς τὸ ἀγαθὸν πρὸς οἰκοδομήν – In Romans 8:28, Paul had said that “the good” is ultimately eternal life and the glorification of being like Jesus as morally perfect human beings in the Kingdom of God. Here, he probably has the same thing in mind, that “each of us” (ἕκαστος ἑμῶν) should “please his neighbor for the purpose of” encouraging one another towards eternal life (τῷ πλησίον ἀρεσκέτω εἰς τὸ ἀγαθὸν) that will result from “the edification” (πρὸς οἰκοδομήν) of his neighbor in this life as each Christian progresses in his understanding of the biblical message. Paul says that the idea is to be pleasing to one’s fellow Christians for their “good,” which he goes on to explain in the next prepositional phrase as building them up in their belief in Jesus the Messiah and obedience to God. Implied is the ultimate goal of this edification process which is the promised and guaranteed future of eternal life which God will eventually give all authentic believers.

³⁷⁹ καὶ γὰρ ὁ Χριστὸς οὐχ ἑαυτῷ ἤρσεν, ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται· οἱ ὀνειδισμοὶ τῶν ὀνειδιζόντων σε ἐπέπεσαν ἐπ’ ἐμέ – Paul quotes Psalm 69:9 to provide an OT reference to David, the first Messiah, who was willing to experience other people’s disapproval and hostility towards Yahweh by their likewise being hostile and disapproving of him. In this way, David, who would rather have not been so mistreated, did not please himself by avoiding it, but pleased God by being willing to share in people’s hostility and disapproval towards Him. Thus, as the first Messiah, he set the example for Jesus who experienced the same opportunity not to please himself (καὶ γὰρ ὁ Χριστὸς οὐχ ἑαυτῷ ἤρσεν) when he chose to endure crucifixion as the end goal of his first appearance and life. He then became the chief example of how Christians should be willing to allow fellow Christians with their poorer understanding of the gospel to limit what they do as that which would be most pleasing to them. The issue here is whom one desires to please—God or oneself? The correct answer is obviously God, so that the community of believers may experience maximum unity, stability, harmony, and love in the process of everyone’s eventually acquiring the same understanding of the biblical message, that of the higher level (of the Gentile in this case).

³⁸⁰ ὅσα γὰρ ἑγραφή, ἑῖς τὴν ἡμετέραν διδασκαλίαν ἑγράφη, ἵνα διὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ ὀδῆς παρακλήσεως τῶν γραφῶν τὴν ἐλπίδα ἔχωμεν – Paul comments that something like Psalm 69:9, written long before his readers and he lived (ὅσα γὰρ ἑγραφή), exists for the purpose of instructing Paul and his readers (εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν διδασκαλίαν ἑγράφη). It is part of the “scriptures” (τῶν γραφῶν), the inerrant and authoritative communication of God through the Jews to themselves and all others (see 2 Timothy 3:16). Thus, by following and obeying the OT, the NT believer perseveres in his belief (διὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς)

and becomes persuaded of the truth (διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως τῶν γραφῶν), in order to have “hope” (τὴν ἐλπίδα ἔχωμεν) and assure himself that he will obtain the eternal mercy and life which God has promised and guaranteed to those who qualify through their enduring belief.

³⁸¹ ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως δῶν ὑμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ Ἰησοῦν – Paul refers to God as the one who sovereignly provides perseverance of belief and persuasion of the truth to authentic believers (ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως). Our persevering belief and our eager expectation of the future Kingdom of God have their source in God ultimately.

Thus, Paul desires that God will “give” (δῶν) and provide the Roman Christians equality of great knowledge and understanding according to what Jesus himself has and would teach about his being the Messiah with its implications (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ Ἰησοῦν). This, of course, would solve the problem stated in chapters 14 & 15 in a heartbeat.

Certainly we can assume that Christians will always disagree on something in regard to the truth of the Bible, including those things that are considering incontrovertible religious practices—eating kosher, for example, under the Mosaic Covenant or doing the Lord’s Supper and baptism under the New Covenant.

But, patiently and lovingly, we should work towards agreement and an accurate understanding of the biblical message. It is also self-evident that God is the one who can bring about complete theological agreement among Christians, if He were to choose to do so. But it is also clear from Christian history that He has not done this. And it looks as though the situation will remain this way until Jesus returns.

Nevertheless, we strive for “the same perspective among one another” (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις), but we never really achieve it.

³⁸² ἴνα ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν ἐνὶ στόματι δοξάζητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – If the Roman believers had an equal and great level of knowledge and understanding of the gospel, the “same impulse with one voice” (ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν ἐνὶ στόματι), then they would also demonstrate the glory, magnificence, and awesomeness of God (δοξάζητε τὸν θεὸν) with equal actions and speech. They would be fully unified in their Christianity, which we notice is not an absolute requirement for their salvation but is merely a bonus to their lives and their expression of worship towards God.

And their oneness of understanding and expression of their Christianity is also to glorify God who is the “Father of or Lord Jesus the Messiah” (πατέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), the source of Jesus and his role as the Messiah and all that this entails.

³⁸³ Διὸ προσλαμβάνεσθε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς προσελάβετο ἑμᾶς εἰς δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ – But these Roman Christians can and should still demonstrate the magnificence of God (εἰς δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ) in the midst of their different levels of understanding the gospel by fully accepting each other (προσλαμβάνεσθε ἀλλήλους) as *bona fide* believers who stand equally accepted before God, just as Jesus demonstrated that he fully accepts them in the midst of their complete lack of understanding of the gospel and belief in God (καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς προσελάβετο ἑμᾶς). In Romans 5, Paul indicated that God and Jesus loved even sinners by Jesus’ dying for them and God’s sending His Spirit into their hearts. Therefore, if Jesus can die for unbelievers and the Spirit can invade sinners in order to change them, Christians should be able to sacrifice their selfish desire to go beyond the religious limits of their fellow Christians and love them in the same manner as Jesus has and God has.

Paul is implying that everything he has written about the gospel of the Messiah, i.e., that Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return is the basis for any sinner’s salvation from God’s wrath and condemnation is what all Christians will hold in common in the midst of other theological differences. But he is also implying that Christian’s loving one another patiently and in this manner is the condition for any sinner’s salvation.

³⁸⁴ λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον ἡγενησθαι περιτομῆς ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ βεβαιῶσαι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν πατέρων – Paul next says that all this can be expressed with the idea that, first, Jesus has served the Jews who are obligated by the Mosaic Covenant to be circumcised (Χριστὸν διάκονον ἡγενησθαι περιτομῆς), through his death in order that he fulfill the truth of God (ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ) be the ground of God’s fulfilling all His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which promises include the land, the nation, and their eventually being the greatest nation in human history (εἰς τὸ βεβαιῶσαι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν πατέρων)—all which God will demonstrate when Jesus returns.

³⁸⁵ τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν, καθὼς γέγραπται: διὰ τοῦτο ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι ἐν ἔθνεσιν ἑ καὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου ψαλῶ – Similarly, Paul says that Jesus has served the Gentiles so that they too may demonstrate God’s glory and magnificence, especially with respect to His eternal mercy (τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν).

Paul also quotes 2 Samuel 22:40 and Psalm 18:49 to the effect that David told God that he, as the Messiah, would speak of Him to the Gentiles (διὰ τοῦτο ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι ἐν ἔθνεσιν). Thus, Jesus has done also through his words, deeds, and crucifixion, drawing the Gentiles into the community of the children of God who are granted mercy and rescued from eternal condemnation—without any obligation to the Mosaic Covenant.

And as David sang to the name of God (καὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου ψαλῶ), Jesus praised the Father by his words and actions as the Messiah.

Paul’s syntax at the beginning of this verse is a bit weird, because he uses the accusative plural τὰ δὲ ἔθνη with the conjunction δὲ rather than the genitive plural as in the previous verse with περιτομῆς to indicate that Jesus the Messiah has become the servant (διάκονον ἡγενησθαι) of the Gentiles just as much as he has the “circumcision.” But this still seems to be the drift of

his argument.

³⁸⁶ καὶ πάλιν λέγει· εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ – Paul then quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 where Moses exhorts the Gentiles to rejoice in Yahweh (εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη), because He avenges the wrongs perpetrated on the Jews. Whoever mistreats God’s people, the Jews, will pay for their evil when God judges and punishes them. This implies also that God will fulfill His promises to Abraham to make of the Jews the greatest nation in history.

In addition, the Gentiles rejoice in the God of the Jews with God’s people, the Jews (μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ).

³⁸⁷ καὶ πάλιν τ· αἰνεῖτε, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, τὸν κύριον καὶ ῥεπαινεσάτωσαν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ λαοί – Next Paul quotes Psalm 117:1 which commands the Gentiles, indeed “all the peoples” (πάντες οἱ λαοί – including the Jews?) to praise Yahweh. Now, of course, they do this as a result of acknowledging Jesus as their king and priest. They join the Jews, as Paul has said in Romans 11, in the two promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

³⁸⁸ καὶ πάλιν Ἡσαΐας λέγει· ἔσται ἡ ρίζα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ὁ ἀνιστάμενος ἄρχειν ἐθνῶν, ἐπ’ αὐτῷ ἔθνη ἐλπιούσιν – The final quote by Paul is of Isaiah 11:10 where the prophet indicates that the real hope of the Gentiles is the descendant of Jesse and David, who is their Messiah and king to whom they will submit. But, as Paul has been explaining in this letter, it is through Jesus, the final Messiah and Son of God, that the Gentiles obtain God’s eternal mercy just as much as the Jews do.

It is in the Messiah and because of the Messiah that the Gentiles find hope for their future just as the nation of Israel finds hope for their future. Thus, David and his descendants, especially the final one of importance, Jesus of Nazareth, become the path to “hope” for both the Jews and the Gentiles—and therefore their common bond in the midst of their different understanding of the how to live the Christian life.

³⁸⁹ Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος ῥληρώσει ὑμᾶς πάσης χαρᾶς καὶ εἰρήνης· ἐν τῷ πιστεύειν, εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου – Paul ends this long section regarding the Gentile Christians who have a better understanding of the gospel than their fellow Jewish Christians by praying that “the God of hope” (Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος) will grant the former, his readers in Rome (“you” – ὑμᾶς), “all joy” and a sense of their future *shalom* in the eternal kingdom of God (καὶ εἰρήνης) in the midst of their believing the gospel of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah (ἐν τῷ πιστεύειν).

As a result he would want them to be like cups being filled with a liquid to the extent that they overflow with the confidence that God will faithfully get them through to the end of their lives (εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι) by His power through the work of the Holy Spirit (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου) by causing their belief to persevere through all the circumstances of life. Another possibility is that ἐν δυνάμει refers to the capability that the Holy Spirit provides Christians to experience belief, joy, and hope. But it probably makes more sense that Paul is once again pointing out that God’s inward work in sinful human beings is powerful enough to cause them to believe, rejoice, and hope in the midst of any issue that might arise in their lives, including the tension that results from having different levels of understanding regarding the requirement of religious practices.

³⁹⁰ Πέπεισμαι δέ, ἀδελφοί ὁμου, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ περὶ ὑμῶν ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ μεστοὶ ἐστε ῥαγαθωσύνης, πεπληρωμένοι πάσης ῥ[τῆς] γνώσεως, δυνάμει καὶ ῥαλλήλους νοουθετεῖν – However these new Christians in Rome came by their understanding of the gospel and which they embraced before this letter, Paul calls them “my brothers” (ἀδελφοί ὁμου) and is sure that they are “full of goodness” (μεστοὶ ἐστε ῥαγαθωσύνης), that comes from an authentic belief in God’s goodness and mercy (μεστοὶ ἐστε ῥαγαθωσύνης), and that they have enough information and understanding (πεπληρωμένοι πάσης ῥ[τῆς] γνώσεως) to make them capable of warning and instructing each other in regard to how to live the Christian life and, therefore, to stay true to the apostolic message (δυνάμει καὶ ῥαλλήλους νοουθετεῖν)—in spite of the fact that they have not heard the gospel from an apostle or perhaps even from one of Paul’s close associates such as Timothy—and in the midst of dealing with their understanding of the gospel that is different from that of their fellow Jewish Christians who are returning to Rome.

This must be very encouraging to them and to us also, that it is possible to acquire an adequate understanding of the good news of Jesus as Messiah and Savior apart from hearing directly from a living apostle. The Roman Christians heard the gospel through Christians who were at least contemporaneous with the apostles. We hear it through either the Bible if we read it or through others who have learned it through their or other’s study of the Bible. But a quick glance at the NT letters reveals how easy it is to get the message wrong, so that we should all be encouraged to study the Bible as diligently as possible, to be humble in our knowledge because of how difficult the Bible is to understand correctly, and to be patient with each other as we all learn the Bible at different rates and in different quantities.

And this is also an encouragement to learn with humility and patience towards others in the midst of the differences in our understanding of religious practices.

The verb νοουθετεῖν means to warn (away from wrong behavior) and to instruct (towards good behavior), which is how I have translated it. Thus, Paul is convinced that these Roman, Gentile Christians can teach other already how to treat one another in the light of the biblical message.

³⁹¹ τολμηρότερον δὲ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἀπὸ μέρους ὡς ἐπαναμμνήσκων ὑμᾶς διὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ῥπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ – Nevertheless, Paul has wanted to make sure that the Roman Christians are grounded in the information which he included in this letter. Thus, he has “written” to them “very boldly” (τολμηρότερον) “on some issues as one who is reminding” them (ἀπὸ μέρους ὡς ἐπαναμμνήσκων). And he did so in the light of the fact that he has been graced by God with the gift and responsibility of

being the apostle to the Gentiles (διὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ). He knows his stuff, and he has desired that they know theirs as well as he does.

³⁹² εἰς τὸ εἶναι με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, ἱεουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ᾖ γένηται ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἔθνων εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ – Using OT and Mosaic Covenant language of the ritual and liturgy of bringing offerings and sacrifices to God in the temple in Jerusalem, Paul is explicit that the gift which God has conveyed to him is a kind of active worship of God (liturgical) as a “servant” of Jesus as the Messiah (εἰς τὸ εἶναι με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), and this specifically for the sake of his presenting the apostolic message to the Gentiles (εἰς τὰ ἔθνη). He calls this “performing the sacred rites of the good news of God” (ἱεουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ). In this way he brings Gentiles into the community of believers and is able to offer them of sorts as an “acceptable” sacrifice as a priest to God (ἵνα ᾖ γένηται ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἔθνων εὐπρόσδεκτος).

In addition, he describes the Gentiles who become believers (or who like the Roman Christians become better grounded believers intellectually) as those people in whom the Spirit of God has worked and made different from the rest of the world by causing them to become authentic in their belief and commitment to God and His plans and purposes (ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ). Paul is implying that the Holy Spirit motivates people to want to know the truth accurately, so that these Roman Christians will work at learning what he has written and add any new thoughts of the gospel from their learning to their existing understanding. In this way, Paul is teaching the Gentiles what exactly proper liturgy is (and is not). It is not the Mosaic Covenant (or religious practices that Christendom has invented over the last 1900 years). It is performing the roles that God has given each Christian to help other Christians grow in their understanding of Jesus as the Messiah and to be kind, gracious, forgiving, and caring towards one another.

³⁹³ ἔχω οὖν [τὴν] καύχησιν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν – Because Paul has the enjoyment of watching God use him in the process of drawing Gentiles to Himself, he can “boast in the Messiah Jesus” (ἔχω οὖν [τὴν] καύχησιν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), which is to say that, as both a Christian and an apostle of Jesus, he can brag about what God does in these situations (τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν), not because Paul is so great, but because God, through the work of the crucified, risen, and ascended Messiah, is so magnificent in dispensing His grace and bringing Gentiles into the community of authentic believers who will obtain life in the eternal Kingdom of God.

³⁹⁴ οὐ γὰρ ᾔτολμήσω τι λαλεῖν ὧν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστὸς δι’ ἐμοῦ ἢ εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἔθνων, λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ – As a result, Paul does not brag about anything that he does in and of himself, as if he were so great as a skillful and accomplished human being (οὐ γὰρ ᾔτολμήσω τι λαλεῖν). Instead, he brags about what “the Messiah accomplishes through him” (ὧν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστὸς δι’ ἐμοῦ), which means what God does in the context of his performing his responsibilities as an apostle to proclaim the information about Jesus to the Gentiles. Paul’s job as an apostle is “for the purpose of the obedience of the Gentiles” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἔθνων), so that Gentiles will obtain eternal life through Jesus as the one who intercedes for him just as much as he does for the Jews.

And Paul performs his job “by word and deed” (λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ), by both what he says and what he does to reveal and demonstrate the good news of eternal salvation from the wrath of God that is available through Jesus as the crucified Messiah. For Paul, it is all about the Messiah and what he as the one who is announced by Paul and made real and true in the minds and hearts of the Gentiles through the overall work of the Father as Paul speaks and acts and as the Holy Spirit changes people’s hearts and moves them to believe the truth that ends up accomplishing the eternal salvation of Gentiles—by both what he says and does there in the 1st century Roman Empire.

This is quite something in the light of the large numbers of people who are polytheists and pagans in Paul’s day. To watch some of them readily convert to believing and following the Jewish Messiah must have been a real thrill for Paul as he experienced this miracle of God within them.

³⁹⁵ ἐν δυνάμει ἢ σημείων ἢ καὶ τεράτων, ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου ὥστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ – Paul indicates that his “word,” i.e. speaking, and his “deed” have been in the context a specific capacity that he has manifested when God has miraculously brought about “signs and wonders” (σημείων ἢ καὶ τεράτων), which most likely include people being healed of illnesses and diseases and people speaking with about God in foreign languages that they have never learned.

And these would have taken place “by the capacity of the Spirit of God” (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου), meaning that God would have worked invisibly to cause these supernatural events to have taken place. Thus, God, by means of His Holy Spirit, has been and continues to work miracles through him to confirm the message of Jesus which he, as an apostle, presents to the Gentiles. And this is “so that [Paul] may fill out the good news of the Messiah from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum” (ὥστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ), that, whether it is Paul or any other apostle, God is using him and working through him for the purpose of extending the territory in which this message is heard—from Jerusalem in the land of Israel to Illyricum on the western coast of northern Greece, which is approximately the same as modern Albania.

And now we know that through the apostolic documents and those who have learned them (to some degree) God has worked in the whole world to spread this message and to cause both Jews and Gentiles to become believers in Jesus as their Messiah, king,

The gift of the gospel to the Greek Christians by the Jewish Christians is worth at least a monetary gift in return.

⁴⁰⁴ τοῦτο οὖν ἵ ἐπιτελέσας καὶ σφραγισάμενος ὁ αὐτοῖς τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον. ἀπελεύσομαι δι' ὑμῶν εἰς Σπανίαν – Paul's plan is to convey this Greek Christians' gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (ἐπιτελέσας καὶ σφραγισάμενος ὁ αὐτοῖς τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον) and then turn right around (hopefully) and head to Spain by passing through Rome and getting the opportunity to spend some time with the Christians to whom he is writing this letter (ἀπελεύσομαι δι' ὑμῶν εἰς Σπανίαν).

⁴⁰⁵ ῥοῖδα δὲ ὅτι ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἑπληρώματι εὐλογίας ἡ Χριστοῦ ἐλεύσομαι – Whenever Paul finally makes it to Rome, he knows that it will be just the right time when he should do so, as God has planned for him as that which fills out his apostolic obligation to the Gentile Christians there (ἐν ἑπληρώματι εὐλογίας ἡ Χριστοῦ ἐλεύσομαι). Thus, not a minute sooner or later will be the correct time for him to visit them. In addition, he will be bringing his understanding of the gospel and his ability to continue educating them in it so as to enhance their understanding and faith.

⁴⁰⁶ Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς ὅ, ἀδελφοί,] διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ πνεύματος συναγωνίσασθαί μοι ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν – With all these plans in mind which Paul has related to the Roman Christians, he asks that they pray to God for his success in performing all that he desires to do, including not running afoul of the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, which would taint his visit there to the Jewish Christians. Unfortunately, he does unintentionally stir up trouble for himself, so that he is arrested by the Romans and makes it to Rome only after appealing to Caesar (see Acts 21ff.).

This verse, then, is a great example of a Christian praying and asking for prayer for something to happen that is perfectly legitimate, but God does not answer quite the way that he wants. Certainly, Paul knows that God is sovereignly in control of all reality, and he also knows that prayer does not itself cause God to do what the prayer wants. Nevertheless, it is still a viable part of a Christian's relationship with God as that which demonstrates the person's love for God and that he is willing to indicate and realizes that he is completely dependent on God for every detail that will exist in his existence.

⁴⁰⁷ ἵνα ῥυσθῶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπειθούντων ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ ἡ διακονία μου ἢ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ εὐπρόσδεκτος τοῖς ἀγίοις γένηται – Paul knows that he is walking into a rattlesnake pit in Jerusalem, where he will encounter those “who are disobedient in Judea” (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπειθούντων ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ). He asks the Roman Christians to pray that God will rescue him (ῥυσθῶ) from harm in Jerusalem and that his gift from the Greek Christians will be well received by the Christians there (ἡ διακονία μου ἢ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ εὐπρόσδεκτος τοῖς ἀγίοις γένηται). Probably, he means that the financial gift will actually make it all the way to Jerusalem, that it will not be stolen by thieves along the way, or taken by his fellow countrymen as if it is immoral for the Greeks to support Jews financially, or end up at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea if he becomes shipwrecked.

⁴⁰⁸ ἵνα ἐν χαρᾷ ἔλθῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ συναναπαύσωμαι ὑμῖν – Ironically, Paul is not “delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea,” but they target him in order to do away with him. Fortunately, the Romans take him into custody, and he eventually spends two years in prison in Caesarea Maritima. Afterwards, the Romans transfer him to Rome to stand trial before Caesar Nero. All this is not exactly the way that Paul had hoped to go to Rome and serve the Christians there, but it obviously happens according to God's sovereign plans and purposes (see Acts 21-28). Paul hoped to be refreshed in his travels by the Christian community in Rome on his way to Spain. But, again, this is not exactly how things turned out for him. He hoped his experience would be one of only joy (ἐν χαρᾷ) in Jerusalem and then refreshment (συναναπαύσομαι) in Rome.

⁴⁰⁹ Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, ὁ ἀμήν. – Paul ends the body of this letter with an appeal to God to grant shalom, i.e., eternal life, to the Roman Christians with the confidence which genuine believers can have because of their belief.

⁴¹⁰ Συνίστημι ὅδε ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὗσαν ὁ[καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχραεῖς – While it would be easy to think that the Christians in this list live in Rome, even after first being expelled as a result of the edict of Claudius in A.D. 49 and then returning in A.D. 59, it makes more sense to see this letter as being written by Paul in this latter year, and then being sent via Phoebe, a citizen of Cenchrea who is being accompanied by all these Jewish Christians who are now returning to Rome. And they are able to do so since the edict has expired ten years after its inception according to government policy and since Claudius has died. Therefore, Paul wants the Gentile Christians to greet these Jewish Christians who will be joining their community of believers in Jesus the Messiah in the capital city.

⁴¹¹ ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως τῶν ἀγίων καὶ παραστήτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρήζη πράγματι καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ – Paul wants the Roman Christians to welcome and give the utmost hospitality to Phoebe. She has been very supportive of other Christians, including Paul.

⁴¹² Ἀσπάσασθε Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν τοὺς συνεργοὺς μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ – Paul's fellow apostolic coworkers are those who are returning to Rome.

⁴¹³ οἵτινες ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς μου τὸν ἑαυτῶν τράχηλον ὑπέθηκαν, οἷς οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος εὐχαριστῶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἔθνῶν – Paul says that Prisca and Aquila have risked their lives for the gospel and him, and they have therefore been very

helpful to the Gentile Christian communities where Paul has journeyed.

⁴¹⁴ καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν. ἀπάσασθε Ἐπαίνετον τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἑσθίας εἰς Χριστόν – Prisca and Aquila have welcomed a gathering of Christians in their home, and Paul wants the Roman Christians to welcome Epaenetus who was the first believer in western Turkey, probably through his own presentation of the gospel. This would have been approximately ten years earlier, around A.D. 47.

⁴¹⁵ ἀπάσασθε Μαρίαν, ἣτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν εἰς ὑμᾶς – A woman by the name of Mary has worked hard for the Roman Christians, perhaps through her prayers for them.

⁴¹⁶ ἀπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουνίαν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ τὸ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ – Paul's Jewish relatives Adronicus and Junia have experienced prison for their faith and are well-known among the other apostles, presumably in Jerusalem. They became believers in Jesus before Paul did.

⁴¹⁷ ἀπάσασθε Ἀμπλιᾶτον τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου ἐν κυρίῳ –

⁴¹⁸ ἀπάσασθε Οὐρβανὸν τὸν συνεργὸν ἡμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ καὶ Στάχυν τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου –

⁴¹⁹ ἀπάσασθε Ἀπελλῆν τὸν δόκιμον ἐν Χριστῷ. ἀπάσασθε τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου – Changing the style of his comments about these people who are traveling to Rome, Paul refers to the fact that Apelles has found approval before God, meaning that Paul is convinced that he has authentic belief.

⁴²⁰ ἀπάσασθε Ἡρῳδία τὸν συγγενὴ μου. ἀπάσασθε τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου τοὺς ὄντας ἐν κυρίῳ –

⁴²¹ ἀπάσασθε Τρύφαιναν καὶ Τρυφῶσαν τὰς κοπιώσας ἐν κυρίῳ. ἀπάσασθε Περσίδα τὴν ἀγαπητήν, ἣτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν ἐν κυρίῳ –

⁴²² ἀπάσασθε Ροῦφον τὸν ἐκλεκτὸν ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐμοῦ –

⁴²³ ἀπάσασθε Ἀσύκριτον, Φλέγοντα, Ἐρμῆν, Πατροβᾶν, Ἐρμᾶν καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀδελφούς –

⁴²⁴ ἀπάσασθε Φιλόλογον καὶ Ἰουλίαν, Νηρέα καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ Ὀλυμπᾶν καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς πάντας ἀγίους –

⁴²⁵ ἀπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἀγίῳ. ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς αἱ ἐκκλησίαι πᾶσαι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. – Paul ends this list of people who are journeying to Rome with an exhortation for the Christians there to greet each other as they will be greeting these people whom he has just listed. In addition, he conveys that all the gatherings of Christians in other areas of the Roman Empire who are aware of them in Rome greet them in a similar manner.

⁴²⁶ Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἴσχοπεῖν τοὺς τὰς διχοστασίας καὶ τὰ σκάνδαλα παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐμάθετε τὸ ποιῶντας, ὅκαὶ ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ' αὐτῶν – Paul's main concern in this letter has been to teach his Gentile readers that they are not at all obligated to the Mosaic Covenant as part of what God requires for them to obtain His eternal mercy. Here he again urges them to avoid anyone, no matter how sincere and correct the person may sound, who tries to convince them otherwise.

⁴²⁷ οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Χριστῷ οὐ δουλεύουσιν ἀλλὰ τῇ ἑαυτῶν κοιλίᾳ, καὶ διὰ τῆς χρηστολογίας καὶ εὐλογίας ἐξαπατῶσιν τὰς καρδίας τῶν ἀκάκων – The spiritual explanation by Paul for what is going on with these people is that they are following their own sinful passions instead of the truth about the Messiah—that only Jesus can rescue sinners from God's condemnation. No one's obedience to the Mosaic Covenant is the basis of their salvation. Nevertheless, these false teachers easily come across by their manner of speaking as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and good leaders, encouraging people in their submission to them by making them feel good about themselves because they are so wonderfully following the “truth.”

⁴²⁸ ἡ γὰρ ὑμῶν ὑπακοὴ εἰς πάντας ἀφίκετο· ἐφ' ὑμῖν οὖν χαίρω, ἥ ἐλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς σοφοῦς τὸ εἶναι εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἀκεραίους δὲ εἰς τὸ κακόν – Once again (see Romans 1:8ff.) Paul applauds the Roman Christians for their belief and the fact that it has become well-known throughout the areas where he has visited (and possibly areas where others have traveled and presented the apostolic message and reported to Paul that the knowledge of the Roman Christians' faith has spread far and wide). In line with the issue of the false teachers he has just mentioned, Paul is delighted by the Roman Christians' authentic belief and grasp of the truth and desires that they continue in such a manner. He urges them to remain attracted to what is truly good and to reject what is truly evil, thus further demonstrating the authenticity of their belief.

⁴²⁹ ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἑσυντρίψει τὸν σατανᾶν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν ἐν τάχει. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν. \ – Paul implies that Satan is the great adversary of God and His people.

Two options for what Paul means by God's quickly crushing Satan under these Christians' feet—

1) When Jesus returns (also implied), God will first destroy Satan's current influence in the world by locking him in the abyss and then eventually completely destroy him after the millennial kingdom (see Revelation 20), or

2) this is metaphorical for the Christians' conquering Satan by rejecting his lies by virtue of their persevering faith and grasping and becoming committed to the important teaching by Paul in this letter.

Whether Paul means by ἐν τάχει either "soon" or "quickly," either option works, but I think I lean towards #1 just as Paul stated in 13:11 that "our salvation is nearer than when we believed." Jesus' return (and any Christian's death) is always nearer every day, and this is what we need to keep our eye on. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have turned from idols to the one true God "to wait for His Son from heaven, who will rescue us from the wrath to come."

Paul also wants his readers to continue in the grace of God which God Himself will cause to happen according to His faithfulness and in the light of Jesus as the Messiah.

⁴³⁰ Ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Τιμόθεος ὁ συνεργός ἡμου καὶ Λούκιος καὶ Ἰάσων καὶ Σωσίπατρος οἱ συγγενεῖς μου τ – We know that these four men are with Paul on his journey to Jerusalem.

⁴³¹ ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ – Paul's secretary who has been writing down his words, Tertius, now personally sends his own greetings to the Roman Christians.

⁴³² ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Γάϊος ὁ ξένος μου καὶ ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας. ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἔραστος ὁ οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως καὶ Κούαρτος ὁ ἀδελφός. τ – And Tertius mentions that these three other men greet them too. Gaius is the city treasurer of Cenchrea. Quartus must be his brother.

⁴³³ ἡ χάρις τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. ἀμήν – This verse is in only the Majority Text and is probably the true end of the letter. Tertius ends his parting words to the Roman Christians by wishing that God's grace remain constant with them—just as Paul did in v. 20.

⁴³⁴ [Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηρίζαι κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνις αἰωνίοις σεσηγημένου – If Paul wrote this, he starts a doxology identifying God as the one who is powerful enough to have changed the Gentile Romans from worshipers of pagan idols to worshipers of Himself and to continue to ground them in their belief in the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah. This message is in line with God's revealing what was not so clear in the OT to that which has become clear to the apostles both through the appearance of the Messiah and his teaching and actions and through the inner work of the Holy Spirit in causing them to understand the truth with the clarity which they have.

⁴³⁵ φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διὰ τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν τ κατ' ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη γνωρισθέντος – The OT writers spoke of the Messiah, and God all along intended to inject the Messiah into human history, so that the information about him could become directly available to even the Gentiles, so that they could believe in him and live their lives in obedience to God by pursuing morality.

⁴³⁶ μόνῳ σοφῷ θεῷ, διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τ, ἀμήν] π – The doxology ends by ascribing eternal magnificence to God who is the only God and wise beyond our comprehension of wisdom, especially when we take into account Jesus as the Messiah and all that his existence means.]