

# INTRODUCTION AND ROMANS

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

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## Introduction

### *I. General Remarks*

A. Romans has played a profound role in church history. The book was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine, the influential theologian of the late fourth and early 5th centuries.

B. Romans played a major role in the Protestant Reformation. Frederic Godet, an NT scholar from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in his commentary on Romans that "the Reformation was undoubtedly the work of the Epistle to the Romans."

1. Indeed, Romans played a pivotal role in the life of Martin Luther, a Catholic priest who was one of the leading voices of the Reformation. It was with regard to insight he received while studying Romans that he wrote, "I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."

2. Romans likewise had a profound effect on the English reformer William Tyndale and on John Calvin, a Frenchman who led the Reformation in Geneva.

C. Modern scholars and expositors are effusive in their praise of the book. They call it "the cathedral of the Christian faith" and describe it as one of "the most important pieces of literature in the intellectual history of Western man." To study Romans is to study one of the deepest and richest revelations of God. If we are not blessed through this study, the fault lies with you or me or both of us but certainly not with the Book of Romans.

## *II. Authorship*

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

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

## *III. Date*

A. Written as Paul is concluding his third missionary journey

1. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem (15:25) at a time when he felt his missionary work in the eastern provinces had been completed (15:9, 23).

2. He is taking to Jerusalem the collection from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor among the saints (15:25-27). This corresponds with Acts 24:17 where, after completing his third missionary journey, Paul says he arrived in Jerusalem with gifts for the poor.

3. After delivering the gift to the saints in Jerusalem, he plans to head for Spain and to visit Rome on the way (15:23-24, 28).

B. Written from Corinth

1. 16:1-2 commends Phoebe, the servant of the church in Cenchræ, Corinth's eastern port (she is presumably carrying the letter).

2. 16:23 has a greeting from Gaius in whose house Paul is staying. This fits with Gaius of 1 Cor. 1:14.

3. 16:23 has a greeting from Erastus, who in the later letter of 2 Timothy (4:20) is said to have stayed in Corinth. Paul describes him as the "treasurer" of the city, and a Latin inscription has been found in Corinth referring to Erastus as "aedile" (commissioner of public works) of the city. That is why NIV translates "treasurer" in 16:23 as "director of public works." The Greek term may be broad enough to refer to the Latin office "aedile," or Erastus may have moved up to that after Romans was written.

4. 16:21 has greetings from Timothy and Sosipater, both of whom are included in Acts 20:4 as being with Paul when he left Greece in route to Jerusalem (Sopater being a shortened form of Sosipater).

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

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

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

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

2. Though Nero was not yet persecuting Christians, his gross immorality was on display. Andreas Köstenberger, Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles write in their introduction to the New Testament (*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 519-520):

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

## *IV. Church at Rome*

### A. Its founding

1. We do not know when or by whom the church in Rome was founded. Paul had not yet been to Rome (1:10, 13, 15:22). Peter is very unlikely because he was still in Jerusalem at the time of Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and there's evidence the church was in Rome by that time (Emperor Claudius's expulsion of Jews over disruption instigated by "Chrestus" was in A.D. 49). Moreover, it is impossible to think that Paul, who in 15:20 states that he will "not build on another person's foundation," would have written this letter or planned the kind of visit he describes in 1:8-15 to a church that was founded by Peter.

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

### B. Its composition

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

2. If Christianity in Rome began among the Jews, how did this shift to a Gentile complexion occur?

a. What probably happened is that "God fearers," Gentiles who were interested in Judaism and attended the synagogue without becoming Jews, were the first Gentiles to be attracted to the faith. This would be in keeping with the pattern of Paul's mission.

b. This shift would have been greatly accelerated by Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome in A.D. 49.

(1) Roman historian Suetonius (A.D. 69-140) reports that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of "Chrestus." Most scholars agree that "Chrestus" is a misspelling of the Greek "Christos" and that the reference is probably to disputes within the Jewish community over the claims of Jesus to be "Christos," the Messiah. This expulsion is referred to in Acts 18:2 (Priscilla and Aquila expelled).

(2) Roman authorities would not have distinguished between Jews and Jewish Christians, so the Gentile element of the various house churches would have come to prominence with the eviction of all or virtually all of the Jews.

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

## *V. Purpose of Letter*

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

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

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

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

3. But perhaps most importantly (Kruse, 10-11), Paul views the predominantly Gentile church in Rome as being among those to whom his apostleship was especially directed (1:5-6, 13; 15:15-16). As he says in 15:15-16, he writes the things he does because in his role as a minister among the Gentiles he wants them to be an acceptable offering to God, meaning he wants them to be grounded in the truth of the gospel. In their specific context, that required him to address the particular matters about which he wrote, which would also serve his interest in securing a missionary base for his work in Spain.

## Text

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

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

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

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

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

3. There is a parallel structure in vv. 3-4 that some translations obscure. In these verses Paul may well be quoting or drawing upon an early Christian creed to summarize the content of the gospel of God mentioned in v. 2.

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



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

a. This is a clear reference to the fact Jesus is the awaited Messiah. The promise to David that his seed would have eternal reign (2 Sam. 7:12-16) became the prime focus of messianic expectation in the OT (e.g., Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5-6, 30:9, 33:14-18; Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24-25) and in Judaism (e.g., Jn. 7:42; Mat. 9:27). That Jesus was the fulfillment of this promise is all over the NT (Mat. 1:1-16; Lk. 1:27, 32, 69; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5, 22:16).

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

5. The eternal Son of God, Jesus the Christ, was *appointed* (same word translated "appointed" in Acts 10:42 and 17:31) "Son of God in power" *from* (ἐκ) the resurrection, meaning at the time of or on the basis of the resurrection. In other words, before the resurrection he was the Son of God in the weakness and lowliness of his earthly existence.

a. As Paul spells out in Phil. 2:5-11, the Son chose to forego certain prerogatives of his divinity in obedience to the will of the Father, only to have bestowed on him through his faithfulness the supremely powerful position of Lord of lords. With the resurrection, Jesus entered a new state or stage of his messianic career; he was exalted to a new position.

b. Ben Witherington remarks in *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 32-33:

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

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

a. His human birth was related to the flesh – not just that it involved human flesh but that it came about in the old order of reality that is passing away, the realm of the flesh. His

exaltation was related to the Spirit of holiness in that it was related to the coming of the new order of reality that is characterized by the complete holiness, complete purifying, that is the work of the Spirit.

b. With Christ's exaltation, the transformation (or "heavenization") of this reality has fully begun – the revolution is fully underway – to be finalized or consummated at his return. The kingdom of God, the heavenly, has invaded this reality, but until the Lord's return, it coexists with the old age that is characterized by things contrary to God's ultimate purpose, things like sin, death, mourning, crying, and pain.

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

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

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

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

8. I believe, with many commentators, that v. 6 is best punctuated "among whom you also are, those called to belong to [*lit.* "of"] Jesus Christ." The Roman Christians are included in the category of people to whom Paul was especially sent, meaning they are predominantly Gentiles, and as such, there should be no question as to his authority regarding them. These (predominantly) Gentiles have responded to God's call to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Paul wants them to know that he had often intended to visit them but had so far been kept from doing so, probably by more pressing responsibilities. He had wanted to visit that he might "have some fruit among them," as he had among the rest of the Gentiles. I think Paul here is

saying, at least primarily, that he wanted to visit that he might convert Gentiles from within their community, but he also wanted to strengthen those already converted in the faith.

4. He feels a sense of *obligation* to all Gentiles: those with Greek language and culture and those without, those who were accomplished intellectually and those who were not. It is that sense of obligation that explains his eagerness to preach the gospel to those in Rome.

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

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

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

a. Martin Hengel expressed this perspective in his little book *Crucifixion* (p. 6-7): "[T]o believe that the one pre-existent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee, as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness."

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

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

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

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

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

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

(2) This is why Jesus told the parables of the tower-builder and the king going to war in Lk. 14:28-33. We often say at weddings that marriage is not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly. In these parables Jesus makes that point about Christian discipleship. "Discipleship changes allegiances with family, requires the willingness to die, shifts the focus off self-centeredness, places one at the disposal of another, and changes the way one handles financial resources" (Snodgrass, *Parables*, 385-386). Becoming a Christian is a radical, life-changing commitment, not merely an intellectual exercise, and one must weigh carefully whether one has the commitment to see it through.

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

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

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

a. When righteousness is attributed to God in the OT, it frequently has reference to his saving activity. That is the form that his righteousness takes. E.g., Isa. 46:13 God promises through the prophet (ESV): "I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay." Ps. 98:2 says (ESV), "The Lord has made known his salvation; he has

revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations." See also, Ps. 35:26-28, 40:10, 51:14, 71:15-16, 71:24, 88:12, 119:123; Isa. 51:5-6, 51:8.

b. In the preaching of the gospel, God's saving action is taking place (being "revealed" in history), and the way it is taking place is through his bestowing a righteous status on those who believe. In other words, the "righteousness of God" here includes *both* God's activity of "making right" – saving, vindicating – *and* the status of those who are made right. It is the act by which God brings people into a right relationship with himself. This saving work of "righteousing" people is, of course, based on the atoning death of Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel.

5. This saving work of God, this rescuing bestowal of righteousness, is "from faith to faith" in that it expands with the spreading of faith; it tracks the expansion of faith because faith is the means of God's saving work. *No one* earns a right relationship with God. Hab. 2:4 points out that the righteous are characterized by faith ("The righteous shall live by faith"). Paul's inspired application of this text develops this point by making clear that faith not only characterizes the righteous but is the means through which they are made righteous by the grace of God ("The righteous from faith shall live").

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

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

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

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

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

(1) That God's saving work, his "righteousing" people through faith, is taking place in the preaching of the gospel is of supreme importance *because* ("For") the terrible wrath of God that ultimately is coming is already being previewed in his wrath upon the ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings.

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

(a) As Stott says, "It does not mean that he loses his temper, flies into a rage, or is ever malicious, spiteful, or vindictive. His wrath is his holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, his just judgment upon it."

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

(3) Paul makes the point that the wrath of God against sinners, both as previewed in history and completed on Judgment Day, is just because God has revealed himself to all mankind through the creation. In Thomas Schreiner's words (p. 86), "God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world." Creation bears witness to God, and yet mankind willfully suppresses that testimony, preferring to go its own foolish way and to create its own gods. Rather than embrace the testimony of creation and give God the glory he is due, humanity culpably represses that truth and substitutes gods of its own making as objects of devotion and reverence. Paul is focusing here on the idolatry of the Gentile world, a world that had a multitude of images that represented their various false gods.

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

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

**<sup>24</sup>Therefore, God handed them over in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, so that their bodies are dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup>They exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever, amen. <sup>26</sup>Because of this, God handed them over to dishonorable passions, for both their females exchanged natural sexual relations for those contrary to nature, <sup>27</sup>and likewise also the males, having abandoned natural sexual relations with the female, were inflamed with their desire for one another, males with males carrying out shameful acts and receiving in themselves the necessary penalty for their error. <sup>28</sup>And as they did**

**not see fit to keep God in [their] knowledge, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do immoral things, <sup>29</sup>those filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and depravity; full of envy, murder, discord, deceit, and malice; gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>without understanding, without faithfulness, without natural affection, without mercy. <sup>32</sup>They, though knowing God's righteous decree that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but also approve of those who practice [them].**

(1) God's wrath is now being expressed in his opening the door to sinful humanity's headlong plunge into wickedness. This foretaste of wrath in these "last days" is God's "handing over" of human beings (vv. 24, 26, 28) to their chosen way of sin and all its consequences. It is something like the parent whose effort to bless his child by providing guidance has been despised for so long that he stops locking up his money, which the child then uses to buy heroin and thus to reap his punishment.

(a) As Stott says, "God abandons stubborn sinners to their wilful self-centredness, and the resulting process of moral and spiritual degeneration is to be understood as a judicial act of God."

(b) That is what is behind Friedrich Schiller's famous comment, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world."

(2) As God "hands them over," we see the depths to which humanity sinks. Their lust finds expression in perverted sex, exemplified by homosexuality. And Paul says that homosexuals receive in themselves the necessary penalty for their error. The sexual degradation they embrace in their rejection of God is punishment in itself; it is part of God's judgment.

(a) Homosexuality in our culture is called "gay." Whatever the etymology of that word as a reference to homosexuals, the implication of the label to modern ears is that the homosexual lifestyle is a kind of a merry, carefree, fun-filled existence. But that is a lie.

(b) Jeffrey Satinover is a psychiatrist with degrees from MIT, University of Texas, and Harvard and a former Fellow in Psychiatry and Child Psychiatry at Yale University. He points out in his 1996 book, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (p. 49-52), that homosexual conduct is associated with numerous serious diseases, including several forms of cancer, and with a high suicide rate, the combined result of which is a 25-30 year decrease in life expectancy! It is anything but "gay." (Note that the high suicide rate is not a product of "homophobia" as it is high in countries like the Netherlands that are largely accepting of homosexual practice.)

(c) This doesn't mean, of course, that homosexuals are beyond God's love and concern. The cross of Christ proves forever the depth of God's love for all



mankind. The question is not whether God loves the homosexual but whether the homosexual will love God. One cannot love God and live in defiance of his commandments (Jn. 14:15, 14:21-24, 15:10, 15:14; 1 Jn. 2:4-6, 5:3; 2 Jn. 6).

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

(e) Paul made clear that the church in Corinth included some who *had been* practicing homosexuals.

[1] He wrote in 1 Cor. 6:9-11: <sup>9</sup>Or do you not know that unrighteous men will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor passive male participants in homosexual intercourse nor active male participants in homosexual intercourse <sup>10</sup>nor thieves nor greedy persons nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And some of you *were* these things; *but* you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were pronounced righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

[Note: NIV 2011 translates clause in v. 9 "men who have sex with men" and states in the footnote "The words *men who have sex with men* translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts." ESV translates it "men who practice homosexuality."]

[2] So do not tell me that homosexuals are beyond the transforming power of the Spirit of God. Our culture rejects and mocks this idea with the slogan "You can't pray the gay away," but Paul leaves no doubt that practicing homosexuals can be freed from the power of sin through their relationship with Christ.

(3) Notice that the sinfulness of homosexual conduct is rooted in the creation account. Verse 20 speaks directly of God's creation, v. 25 refers to God as the Creator, and vv. 26-27 allude to the creation of mankind through the use of the adjectives "male" and "female," as in the creation account, rather than the nouns "man" and "woman." Homosexual conduct is contrary to nature in that it is contrary to God's design of mankind as male and female and his intention for their exclusive coupling. So attempts to restrict Paul's condemnation to exploitative forms of homosexual conduct or to homosexual conduct performed as part of idolatrous worship are groundless.

(4) Denials to the contrary notwithstanding, humans know at some level that God is God and that he deserves the utmost honor, and despite that knowledge, they

continue to rebel against him and to approve of those who do. They know what they do is wrong and that it deserves condemnation by God. This knowledge is probably due both to the revelation of God through creation and to the "law of the heart" referred to in 2:14-15, the basic moral sense that is implanted within us by virtue of our being made in the image of God. This "general revelation" is sufficient to make all people culpable for disobeying, but "special revelation" is required for people to be saved.

(5) In saying that they *not only* do such wicked things *but also* approve of those who do such wicked things, Paul suggests that their *approval* of wrongdoing by others is even more culpable than their own wrongdoing. Cranfield states (p. 135):

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

(6) And yet we have so-called Christians posting videos on the website of a Bible-despising homosexual activist (Dan Savage) communicating the message that not all Christians are like the ones who say that homosexual behavior is sinful. This is a direct attack on God and his word masquerading as compassion, and God is not pleased with it.

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

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

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

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

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

(a) Paul now turns his attention to the Jews, but he does not name them expressly until v. 17. As Grant Osborne notes (p. 44-45), "Greater space and effort go into showing Jewish guilt, for they had too little awareness of their actual position before God. They were the covenant people and therefore, they believed, exempt in some fashion from his wrath. Paul shows that that is not the case."

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

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

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

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

**<sup>6</sup>who will repay each one according to his works. <sup>7</sup>To those who, by persistence in good work, seek glory and honor and immortality, [he will give] eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but to those who are self-seeking and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness,**

**teousness, [he will give] wrath and anger. <sup>9</sup>[There will be] affliction and distress on every human being who carries out what is evil, both Jew first and Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace for everyone who works what is good, both Jew first and Greek, <sup>11</sup>for there is no partiality with God.**

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

(b) I am with those who believe that Paul is here speaking about the condition for salvation apart from Christ. He is establishing the point that, when it comes to salvation, Jews and Gentiles are in the same position. In other words, the ground at the foot of the cross is level *even for Jews and Gentiles*. Without the atoning death of Christ, we are *all* on our own; we stand before God on the basis of our own obedience and righteousness. If anyone was *unfailingly* obedient – that is, was not self-seeking, did not obey unrighteousness, did not carry out what is evil – he would indeed inherit eternal life on that basis. But, as Paul will show, the power of sin prevents anyone from being good enough to merit salvation. Douglas Moo comments (p. 142):

[T]he context strongly suggests that Paul is not directly describing Christians in vv. 7 and 10. Paul's purpose in 2:6-11 is to establish the principle that God will judge every person on the same basis – by works, not by religious heritage or national identity. Paul's focus is on the standard of judgment. . . .

Paul sets forth the biblical conditions for attaining eternal life apart from Christ. Understood this way, Paul is not speaking hypothetically. But once his doctrine of universal human powerlessness under sin has been developed (cf. 3:9 especially), it becomes clear that the promise can, in fact, never become operative because the condition for its fulfillment – consistent, earnest seeking after good – can never be realized.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(a) Paul drives home to his imaginary Jewish opponent the foolishness of thinking that mere possession of the law will work for their salvation. If Jews do not practice the truth they preach from the law, they are hypocrites who dishonor God and cause him to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (as was written).

(b) Paul is not suggesting that every Jew commits these particular sins, or even that they are typical among Jews. Rather, these sins are examples of blatant hypocrisy which make the point that obedience to the law is crucial. If mere possession of the law was all that mattered, then even these acts of hypocrisy would not matter. Instead of excusing disobedience, having the law makes it even more offensive.

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

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

(a) Neither does circumcision exempt the Jew from judgment. Being marked as a person of God has value only if they live up to it, if they keep the law. If they break the law, their standing with God symbolized by circumcision has been forfeited. Conversely, if someone without the mark of circumcision should keep the law, he will be treated as a person of God, as one possessed of the reality symbolized by circumcision. In that case, he would judge the one who, though having the law and circumcision, transgressed the law.

(b) The "real Jew," the person whose praise is from God, is not the one who looks like a Jew but the one who has been circumcised of heart. The Gentile who obeyed the law would fall in that category, whereas the Jew who transgressed it would not. God is concerned with what you are, not what you look like (hence circumcision is not a criterion of salvation).

(c) A number of scholars, especially in the Reformed tradition, argue that baptism is the New Covenant equivalent of circumcision and conclude that baptism likewise is irrelevant to salvation. This, however, is incorrect. According to the N.T., baptism is not merely a physical rite; rather, it is the moment of *spiritual* circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). It is when the "old man" is removed and one is made new by the Spirit of God.

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

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

**What then is the advantage of the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?**

**<sup>2</sup>Much, in every way. First, that they were entrusted with the sayings of God.**

**<sup>3</sup>For what if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup>Absolutely not! Let God be truthful and every person a liar, just as it is written: "that you may be proved right in your words and will prevail when you contend."**

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

(b) Paul says "Not so." The advantage of being a Jew extends to a significant number of matters (see, 9:4-5), the first of which is that they have been entrusted with the sayings or oracles of God. That God's word, which includes his promises, came to the Jew is indicative of his special relationship with them. Deut. 4:8 says, "What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" and Ps. 147:19-20 says, "He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws."

(c) To this, an objector might ask, "But what advantage is there to having the word of God to those who have been unfaithful to it?" Paul anticipates this by asking, "For what if some were unfaithful?" (Christian Jews were, of course, not unfaithful to that word.) He then makes clear (with a question and answer) that such faithlessness in no way nullifies the faithfulness or trustworthiness of God. Faithlessness will indeed be judged, but that is *according* to God's word, not *contrary* to it. He is equally faithful when he judges his people's sins and when he fulfills his promises of blessings (e.g., Neh. 9:32-33; Lam. 1:18). So unfaithfulness on their part in no way diminishes the word with which they were entrusted. God remains true to that word even if every human being should prove unreliable.

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

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

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

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

(a) Having said that God's "righteousness" (here meaning his faithfulness to himself and his word) is shown even in his judgment of unrighteousness, Paul raises the objection that this would somehow make it unjust or unrighteous for God to judge sin (because sin is ultimately good in that it provides a platform for the exhibition of God's faithfulness). Just the mention of the idea of God being unrighteous causes Paul to say he is speaking in a strictly human fashion (i.e., through limited human perception).

(b) Paul summarily rejects the idea as absurd. If it were unjust for God to inflict wrath, then he could not judge the world because he is perfectly just. Since he is in fact going to judge the world (that was not an issue), that proves it is not unjust for him to do so. Case closed.

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

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

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

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

a. The fact God has related specially to the Jews in history does not mean they have an advantage over Gentiles in terms of judgment and salvation. Apart from Christ, everybody is judged on their works, not on whether they are a Jew or a Gentile. And as Paul has already shown in 1:18 - 2:29, all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin and are therefore guilty before God.



b. To substantiate his point, Paul cites a string of O.T. verses stating that human sinfulness is universal. Certainly some of these were, in their original contexts, hyperbolic statements made to highlight the pervasiveness of unrighteousness without or within Israel, not to deny there were *any* righteous people in Israel. (There were some who were righteous, but they were the faithful, those who were righteous by faith.) Paul is saying these verses are true at a literal level, in terms of humans as they appear before the Lord apart from his grace. Even Abraham and David, in themselves, were "unrighteous" in the sense of being guilty of sin.

c. Whatever the O.T. says ("law" in this wider sense), it says to those to whom the O.T. has been entrusted (Jews). The reason Scripture addresses the Jews is so that *every person* may be silenced, meaning having no defense before God. The idea is that if Jews, God's chosen people, have no defense before God, then it follows that Gentiles, who have no claim on God's favor, are also guilty.

d. The fact of the matter is that no one will be pronounced righteous in God's sight by doing what the law demands. *If* one obeyed the law flawlessly, one indeed would be justified by doing the law (2:13), but no one does so because of the power of sin (3:9, 10-18). Rather than justification, through the law comes the knowledge of sin. The law provides an understanding of sin's power, as we fail to obey God's commands and incur guilt and condemnation.

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

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

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

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

b. Though the law is impotent to save because the power of Sin has ravaged mankind, God has now effected or worked salvation apart from the law through faith in Jesus Christ. This saving activity, while outside the confines of the old covenant, is attested by the law and the prophets, meaning that the O.T. bears witness to the gospel of Christ.

c. This saving work of God is through faith in Jesus Christ – to *all* who believe. Faith is the means by which God's justifying work becomes applicable to individuals.

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

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

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

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

h. God's having presented Jesus as a wrath-averting sacrifice not only demonstrates his righteous character (holiness) with regard to his having passed over former sins, but it also demonstrates it with regard to his acquitting sinners in the present because Christ provides full satisfaction of the demands of God's holy justice.

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

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

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

(1) Given that salvation is a gift, a work of God that is appropriated by faith, there is no basis for boasting as though salvation was achieved by one's performance or works. Paul is thinking here particularly of Jews and the tendency of some of them to think that their works of law constituted some kind of claim on God. Such boasting is excluded, not by the "law" of works, but by the "law" of faith, that is, by the "rule" that justification is by faith apart from works of the law. (Paul employs the term "law" as a play on the law of Moses.)

(2) If justification is by works of the Mosaic law, then only Jews can be justified. This would imply that God is the God only of Jews. The fact, however, is that, since there is only one God, he is God of both Jews and Gentiles (or else the Gentiles would be left with no god). As the God of both Jews and Gentiles, he (in Christ) justifies in a way that accepts (and transcends) the national and cultural identities of each – that is, by faith. In other words, in the gospel the universality of God's rule is clearly manifested because in it salvation is available to Gentiles as Gentiles. The dividing wall of the law has been removed (Eph. 2:11 - 3:6). Salvation by faith apart from the Mosaic law flows naturally from the fact of monotheism.

(3) In response to Paul's insistence that justification is by faith, to the exclusion of works of the law, some apparently accused Paul of nullifying the law, denying it any usefulness. Paul flatly denies the charge. Rather than nullify the law, Christians "uphold the law," meaning they uphold its transcendent moral requirements. Let me develop this a bit.

(a) The Abrahamic covenant was the fundamental covenant governing the relationship of God with his people. The blessings promised by God to Abraham and his seed were predicated on their trusting God, on their accepting him for who he is (Gen. 12:1-9, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, 18:17-19, 22:15-18, 24:7; Rom. 4:16-17; Gal. 3:6-9).

(b) The Mosaic covenant was entered into hundreds of years later by God and the people of Israel at Sinai (Ex. 20:1 - 24:8). It was an interim, subsidiary covenant given until God's promise to Abraham began to be fulfilled in Christ. It specified the way

in which the faith of God's people was to be expressed until Christ came. Its temporary nature is evident in Gal. 3:15 - 4:7 and 2 Cor. 3:4-18; see also, Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 7:11-12.

(c) The Mosaic covenant included the grandest and most complete expression to that time of God's moral requirements, but moral requirements did not begin at Sinai. Mankind was under moral requirements from creation, a fact to which Noah's flood bears solemn witness. Genesis 6:5 states (ESV): The LORD saw that the *wickedness* of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only *evil* continually. Genesis 6:11-13 state (ESV): <sup>11</sup> Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with *violence*. <sup>12</sup> And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. <sup>13</sup> And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

(d) Some of the commands in the Mosaic covenant were peculiarly covenantal, meaning they were not universal moral desires of God. They erected civil and ceremonial or ritualistic ("amoral") distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, probably (at least in part) to keep the people of God untainted by pagan practices in order to help them serve as a witness to their Gentile neighbors of the blessed life that exists under God.

(e) A new covenant was instituted between God and mankind through the sacrifice of Christ, the effect of which was to render the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, obsolete or no longer operative (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15 – 4:7, 4:21-31; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13). And with the fulfillment in Christ of the planned obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant, the *set of commands* that were part of that covenant, the Mosaic law, ceased to be binding.

(f) That the Mosaic law ceased to be binding is clear from texts like Rom. 10:1-4, Gal. 3:23-25, and Heb. 7:11-14 but also from the fact specific regulations that were part of the Mosaic law — such as Sabbath regulations (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6), food laws (Rom. 14:1 – 15:13; 1 Cor. 10:23 – 11:1), and circumcision (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 11-12, 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2) — are said to be no longer binding. That is why Paul, a Jew, could declare that he was not under the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:20).

(g) Though the *set of commands* that constitute the Mosaic law ceased to be binding, many of the individual commands included in that law have an ongoing or renewed applicability, and indeed find their full expression, in the new covenant. For example, Paul in Eph. 6:2 commands children to "honor your father and mother," quoting from the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16. The Ten Commandments also are reflected in N.T. commands and prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. Indeed, there are literally hundreds of commands in the N.T. – dos and don'ts – issued by Spirit-inspired writers.

(h) That some commands included within the Mosaic law have ongoing validity while others do not is evident from 1 Cor. 7:19, where Paul says that circumcision is nothing but keeping God's commandments is everything. You say, "Wait a minute –

circumcision is a commandment of God," to which Paul would say "I don't mean those kinds of commandments."

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

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

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

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

(a) Having made the claim that salvation is by grace through faith for both Jew and Gentile and that boasting before God is therefore excluded, Paul addresses whether Abraham contradicts this claim.

[1] He no doubt chose Abraham because Abraham was revered by the Jews as their "father" and was held up particularly as a model of obedience to God. Moo notes that in Judaism, Abraham's "righteousness and mediation of the promise were linked to his obedience, it even being argued that he had obeyed the law perfectly before it had been given."

[2] Also, Abraham played a decisive role in the formation of the people of Israel and in the transmission of the promise, so he must be integrated theologically into Paul's teaching if that teaching was to have any claim of continuity with the O.T.

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

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

(d) If *Abraham's* works did not earn his righteousness, then no works will. As John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople from A.D. 398-407, remarked:

For a person who had no works, to be justified by faith was nothing unlikely. But for a person richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from these, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder, and to set the power of faith in a strong light.

(e) Harmony with James

[1] Jas. 2:21 says Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. James means "justified" in the sense he maintained the righteous status previously bestowed on him. One maintains one's righteous status "by works" only in the secondary or derivative sense that biblical faith necessarily and inevitably expresses itself in works. Without works one ceases to be right with God, not because works earn one's righteousness but because the absence of them means there is no longer a living, saving faith. James stresses the works component of faith because he is addressing the error that one can be saved through a nonworking faith, through mere intellectual assent.

[2] Jas. 2:24 says a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. He means not by "intellectual assent" alone. Saving faith is the "yes" of the total person, intellect *and* will.

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

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

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

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

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

(b) He received circumcision as a sign of his preexisting righteousness by faith so that he might serve as the father of all who believe, both Jew and Gentile. Because he believed while uncircumcised, he is the father of Gentile believers. Because he believed and was *also* circumcised, he is qualified to be the father of all Jewish believers, that is, those who follow in Abraham's faith by believing God's promise in Christ. It is through faith, and not through incorporation into the nation of Israel, that one becomes Abraham's spiritual "child."

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

**<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he would be heir of the world, was not through law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those of the law are heirs, faith has been emptied and the promise has been nullified. <sup>15</sup> For the law produces wrath. (And where there is not law, neither is there transgression.) <sup>16</sup> For this reason, namely that it may be according to grace, it is from faith, so that the promise may be certain to all the seed, not only to the one of the law but also to the one of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all <sup>17</sup> (just as it is written, "I have made you the father of many**

nations") in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls the things not existing as existing. <sup>18</sup> He believed against hope on the basis of hope, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been said, "So shall your seed be." <sup>19</sup> And without weakening in faith, he considered his own body, which had already "died" (being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver in unbelief with regard to the promise of God but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God <sup>21</sup> and being fully persuaded that he is able to do what he has promised. <sup>22</sup> Therefore, "it was credited to him as righteousness."

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

[1] The land promise given to Abraham came to be seen in Judaism as symbolizing a broader promise of ultimately inheriting the world (Kruse, 212-213). Paul endorses that view but sees the fulfillment of the promise in light of Christ and all that is promised in him. The saints will receive the world as their inheritance in the sense their destiny is life in a redeemed creation, a matter Paul will address in chapter 8.

[2] Kruse (p. 213, n. 122) quotes the following from Severian of Gabala, a bishop in Syria at the end of the fourth century: "Paul says that the righteous will inherit the world because the ungodly will be thrown out and handed over to punishment on the day of judgment, but the righteous will possess the universe which remains, and will have been renewed, and the good things of heaven and earth will be theirs."

(b) For if the inheritance was to be realized through the Mosaic law, then one would believe in vain and the promise would never be fulfilled because no sinful human being can adequately obey the law (see, e.g., Gal. 2:16). Rather than securing the inheritance, the law produces even more wrath. It turns "sin" into the more serious offense of "transgression," and though Paul does not mention it here, it actually stimulated and provoked disobedience in the unregenerate heart.

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

(d) The God in whom Abraham believed is described as he "who gives life to the dead and calls things not existing as existing." God's giving of life to the dead



is pertinent to Abraham's case in that his body "had already died" and Sarah's womb was dead (v. 19). God's calling things not existing as existing is pertinent to Abraham's case in that God declared him the father of many nations before it was so (in time).

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

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

[1] Paul is referring to Genesis 17:15ff. where Abraham is told by God that Sarah will bear him a son. I say that because he says Abraham was "about a hundred years old," which is how old he was in Genesis 17, and he mentions that Abraham considered the condition of his and Sarah's bodies, which is just what he did in Gen. 17:17. So whatever you make of Abraham laughing at the promise and asking whether a son will be born to him and Sarah, Paul says it was not a case of: (wavering/doubting/being divided) (because of/in) (unbelief/disbelief).

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

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

[4] But I am not convinced Abraham is doubting God's promise in Gen. 17:17. It could be he is laughing at the picture of him and Sarah as parents. In

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[2] His death was the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His resurrection may be linked to our justification in that it confirms that the atoning sacrifice has

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

3. Grant Osborne writes (*Romans*, IVP, p. 123-124):

So Paul has now summed up his points. In 3:21 – 4:25 his doctrine of salvation by faith alone, apart from works, is complete. At the heart of his doctrine is the fact that Christ's death was a "sacrifice of atonement" (propitiation, 3:25) that paid the price for our sins ("redemption") and resulted in God's legal decision to pronounce us "right" before him (justification, 3:21-26). The key is faith rather than observing the law, and this means that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (3:27-31). To prove this, Paul turns to Abraham, the father of the nation and the one who precedes Moses (4:1-25), showing that faith has precedence over the law as the means by which one participates in salvation.

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

#### A. The Hope of Glory

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

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

**through the death of his Son, even more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup>And not only [that], but also we boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

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

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

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

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

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

(1) Colin Kruse writes (p. 227-228):

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

(2) Thomas Schreiner states (p. 254):

The parallels in Romans 8 (8:17, 18, 21, 30) demonstrate that this glory is an eschatological reality, not a present possession. The already-not yet character of Paul's eschatology emerges in this paragraph. Believers are righteous in God's sight, enjoy the eschatological covenant of peace, and stand in the end-time gift of grace. Nonetheless, the full promises of salvation have not yet been realized. We still await future glorification, which will involve moral perfection and restoration to the glory

Adam lost when he sinned. . . . Believers are certain now that the glory Adam lost will be restored to them. Indeed, the glory restored to believers will be even greater than the glory Adam once had, for believers will be conformed to the second Adam, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29).

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

f. Not only do Christians "boast" in the hope of God's glory, but we also "boast" ("rejoice") in the very hardships that might cause some to doubt that we really are at peace with God, in his favor, and headed for glory. We do so because, as we faithfully endure hardships, we prove our character (our "spiritual stuff"), which serves to strengthen our hope. A faith that is steadfast in trials, that maintains hope in the face of hopelessness, comes through with even greater hope than before. So what on the surface appears contrary to hope, in the end proves to be a means for strengthening it. See, Rom. 4:18-19.

g. The Christian hope will not turn out to be misplaced (and thus a source of shame). We will not turn out to have been duped. We know that God is not making fools of us because the Spirit has taught us how much God loves us.

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

i. In vv. 9-10 Paul reiterates and expands on the central idea of the certainty of Christian hope. The point is that, if God has already done the more difficult thing – to reconcile and justify unworthy sinners – how much more can he be depended on to accomplish the "easier" thing – to save from wrath on Judgment Day those who have been brought into such relationship with him.

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

k. Not only will Christians be saved, but as he stressed in vv. 1-4, we presently rejoice in all that God has given us in Jesus Christ, the one through whom we have received reconciliation. Moo quotes Chrysostom: "And so the fact of his saving us, and saving us

too when we were in such plight, and doing it by means of his only-begotten, and not merely by his only-begotten, but by his blood, weaves for us endless crowns to glory in."

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

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

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

a. The basic point of this section is certainly easier than the details. The basic point is this: the fact God has justified and reconciled his enemies through the death of one man, Jesus Christ, and can therefore be counted on to save them, is not as strange as it may seem. It means that just as there existed a death-producing connection between Adam and his own, so there exists a life-producing connection between Christ and his own.

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

c. Paul says that sin, which he personifies or speaks of as an entity, entered into the human world or stream through Adam and that death entered through sin. Adam, the first man, is held responsible for introducing this Power into the human experience. He is what epidemiologists call "ground zero"; he introduced the plague. Paul is well aware that Eve sinned first (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14), but Adam is the representative of mankind in salvation history.

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

(1) As Kruse points out (p. 243), the claim by some that Paul here refers *only* to spiritual death runs aground on the fact Gen. 3:22 implies that Adam would have lived forever if he had not sinned (i.e., sin is the cause of his death, his not living forever). Also the statement in Gen. 3:19 that man shall now "return to the ground" indicates that physical death is included.

(2) Moo notes (p. 320):

Paul frequently uses "death" and related words to designate a "physico-spiritual entity" – "total death," the penalty incurred for sin. Here, then, Paul may focus on physical death as the evidence, the outward manifestation of this total death; or, better, he may simply have in mind this death in both its physical and spiritual aspects.

(3) Moo, Dunn, Morris, Fitzmyer, Mounce, Schreiner, Osborne, and Kruse are among the modern commentators who recognize that the death Paul had in mind in Rom. 5:12 includes spiritual death. So that understanding is by no means odd.

e. Adam died spiritually that day in that he was alienated from God, the source of all life. He was condemned to die physically in that he was excluded from the tree of life, which represents God's life-sustaining provision. He also was condemned to die eternally (the "second death" of Revelation) in that, barring restoration of spiritual life through forgiveness during his now temporary physical life, he would be sent to hell at the final judgment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

g. Paul says in 5:12 that in the same way it happened to Adam, "death spread to all people, *because all sinned*." In other words, just as Adam sinned and was therefore sentenced to death as God's judgment, all people after him likewise sinned and were sentenced to death as God's judgment. Death spread because Adam's descendants followed him in sinning and earned the same judgment. There is a great deal to unpack here and substantial room for disagreement.

(1) With what is probably a majority of modern scholars (Moo, 323), I understand the phrase "because all sinned" to refer to acts of sin that people have committed personally and not to Adam's sin being imputed to them because he is their ancestor. Scholars are led to this conclusion largely because every other occurrence of the verb "sin" in Paul's letters, including Romans (see esp. 2:12, 3:23), refers to voluntary sins that people commit themselves.



(a) For example, C. E. B. Cranfield states (*Romans*, ICC, 1:279):

While the arguments in favour of [interpretation] (iv) and against (vi) are thus by no means compelling, there is on the other side the important consideration that there is nothing in the context or in this verse to suggest that ἥμαρτον is being used in an unusual sense and that in every other occurrence of this verb in the Pauline epistles the reference is quite clearly to actual sin. We conclude that πάντες ἥμαρτον has the same meaning here as it has in 3:23 [for all sinned and come short of the glory of God], and that interpretation (vi) is to be accepted as most probable.

(b) Joseph Fitzmyer states (*Romans*, Anchor Bible, 417): "The vb. *hēmarton* should not be understood as 'have sinned collectively' or as 'have sinned in Adam,' because they would be additions to Paul's text. The vb. refers to personal, actual sins of individual human beings, as Pauline usage elsewhere suggests (2:12; 3:23; 5:14, 16; 6:15; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:28, 36; 8:12; 15:34), as the context demands (vv 16, 20), and as Greek Fathers understood it (see Lyonnet, *Bib* 41 [1960]: 325-55)."

(c) Thomas Schreiner writes (*Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, 275), "The verb [Paul uses] refers regularly to voluntary sin that people commit in their own persons (cf. 2:12; 3:23; see Wilckens 1978: 316-317; Kasemann 1980: 148-49; Jungel 1963: 51-52; Fitzmyer 1993c: 417). It is quite improbable on linguistic grounds that 'all sinned' means 'all sinned in Adam.'"

(d) Stephen Westerholm writes (*Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 423), "However we define the relation between Adam's sin and that of his offspring, πάντες ἥμαρτον most naturally means that all committed concrete sins; moreover, the words are part of a phrase (introduced by ἐφ' ᾧ, "inasmuch as") affirming that people's sins led to their death."

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

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

[1] As Fitzmyer (p. 413) remarks, to take "all" in Rom. 5:12 to include infants is "a precision that Paul does not envisage." Craig Keener (*Bible*

*Background Commentary*) states regarding 3:23 that "Jewish sources agreed that everyone sinned (with rare exceptions, like a young child)."

[2] Cranfield states (1:279): "It has also sometimes been argued that πάντες [all] must include those who have died in infancy, and that the contention that infants participate by seminal identity in the primal sin of Adam is more intelligible than the contention that they commit actual sins. But those who die in infancy are a special and exceptional case, and Paul must surely be assumed to be thinking in terms of adults."

[3] Moo states (p. 327, fn. 58) that "Paul may want [in 5:12] to describe only the situation of responsible adults." He writes a bit later (p. 331, fn. 75), "As we noted in commenting on v. 12, Paul does not seem even to be considering in these verses the special issues created for the doctrine of universal sin and judgment by mentally restricted human beings."

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

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

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

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

(b) Second, in Rom. 7:9-10 Paul says that at one time he was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and he died. I think it very likely that Paul is referring to a time in his childhood before he was accountable for obeying the law. As soon as the law became applicable to him, "sin living in him" (the predisposition to sin) sprang into action, producing transgression and consequent judgment death. If that is correct, Paul

obviously was not born spiritually condemned. Rather, he was born alive and then died when Sin caused him to transgress the law.

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

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

[2] By the time of Ezekiel, Israel had twisted this warning about the gravity of sin into a denial of personal accountability. God was punishing them for their own sin, and yet they claimed they were merely receiving the consequences of their fathers' sins (by quoting the proverb "The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge"). They thereby avoided guilt, which removed the need for repentance. Since they were in fact being punished, and since punishment is inflicted only on the guilty, God demanded that they stop rationalizing their guilt.

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

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

[2] Now few, if any, proponents of original guilt are willing to accept the notion of infant damnation, so they argue instead that infants are (or may be) saved in some special way. The Bible, however, gives no hint of such a thing. On the contrary, it stresses that salvation comes through hearing and believing the gospel (e.g., Rom. 1:16, 10:8-17; 1 Cor. 1:18). If infants do in fact need salvation, it seems strange that the manner of their deliverance is addressed nowhere in Scripture. If, however, infants are not guilty, the silence is perfectly understandable.

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

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

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

(3) Cranfield puts it this way (1:278):

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

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

i. Whether this predisposition to sin has been transmitted socially, psychologically, and/or biologically is debated, but however it was transmitted, our sin, and hence our death sentence, is traceable to Adam.

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

(2) The psychological idea is that, when man became mortal as a consequence of Adam's sin, he became inclined to overcome the resulting anxiety and insecurity by asserting his control and independence, which inclination leads to sin. See, Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1:174).

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

(a) As Adam Harwood writes in his book *The Spiritual Condition of Infants* (p. 153): "The argument of this book is that infants inherit from Adam a sinful nature but not guilt. The sinful nature that infants inherit will eventually result in their becoming guilty by knowingly committing acts of sin. It is at that point that people immediately fall under God's judgment and condemnation."

(b) This was likewise the view of Alexander Campbell, so it certainly is not foreign to those in churches of Christ. He wrote in *The Christian System* (1839, p. 15-16): "True, indeed, it is, our nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam before it was transmitted to us; and hence that hereditary imbecility to do good, and that proneness to do evil, so universally apparent in all human beings." He declared that we are all "[c]ondemned to natural death, and greatly fallen and depraved in our whole moral constitution . . . in consequence of the sin of Adam."

j. Moo remarks (p. 329):

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

k. Just how it is that we are blameworthy, culpable, for our sinning despite being heirs of the fallenness introduced by Adam is nowhere explained, which has led to divergent speculations about the matter. Paul seems content simply to hold these two truths in tension. As James D. G. Dunn remarks about Paul's discussion in Romans 7 in *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (p. 113): "The issue of personal responsibility [Paul] tried to resolve by depicting 'sin' as a power which fully masters the fleshly 'I' (7.14), without really denying the 'I' 's part in the evil it does or exculpating its failure to do the good (7.14-23)."

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

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

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

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

(2) "Transgression," however, is a different story. To *transgress* is to violate the will of God as revealed in an express commandment.

(a) Cranfield states (1:170, fn. 3), "The idea contained in these words [transgression and transgressor], as they are used in the NT, is that of the transgression of a known, concrete divine commandment."

(b) As Moo puts it (p. 277), "'Transgression' denotes a specific kind of sin, the 'passing beyond' the limits set by a definite, positive law or command. While every 'transgression' is also a 'sin,' not every 'sin' is a 'transgression.'"

(c) In commenting on Rom. 7:8, Schreiner writes (p. 367), "Twice already in Romans (4:15; 5:13-14) Paul has distinguished between sin without the law and sin committed in violation of specifically revealed commandments. The latter is sometimes called "transgression" (cf. 4:15, *παράβασις, parabasis*), and it can be distinguished from sin in general because it involves disobedience to a command revealed by God."

(d) So the existence of "law," in the sense of express commands, is a precondition to transgression but not to sin. That's what Paul means when he says in Rom. 4:15b, "And where there is not law, neither is there *transgression*." As Moo notes (p. 277), Paul in Rom. 4:15 "is not claiming that there is no 'sin' where there is no law, but, in almost a 'truism,' that there is no deliberate disobedience of positive commands where there is no positive command to disobey."

(3) The statement in v. 13 that "sin is not *charged* when there is no law" does not mean it is not sin or that it is ignored and not punished. How could it mean that in light of the Old Testament witness? Rather, it means that without law sin cannot be counted as a violation of specific commands and prohibitions.

(a) As Ben Witherington remarks (*Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 147), "Paul cannot mean that God simply ignored sin since he surely knows the story of Noah. Thus what Paul seems to mean is that sin was not reckoned as transgression, for the latter involves a willful violation of a known law."

(b) Cranfield writes (1:282):

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

(c) Schreiner writes (p. 279):

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

m. It is true that prior to the Mosaic law people did not *transgress* as did Adam, but they still *sinned*, and because they sinned, God's judgment of death spread to them in the same way it had come on Adam. In Johannes Schneider's words (*TDNT*, 5:740): "The command which Adam received and transgressed was that he should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Men who lived in the time between Adam and Moses sinned, but they were not guilty of transgression in the same way as Adam. For in the intervening period there was no express statement of God's commandment. Hence ἡμαρτία [sin] was present but not παράβασις [transgression]."

n. So the point of vv. 13-14, as I see them, is that the extent of Adam's death-producing effect on humanity was not limited by having skipped those generations that lived prior to the giving of the Mosaic law, as though sin and its accompanying death sentence could occur only when there was a "law," an express commandment like Adam had. Adam's deadly effect was realized in people's *sinning* not only in their *transgressing*, and thus he brought condemnation, judgment death, on all of mankind, including those prior to the Mosaic law. (Again, Paul is not

considering the case of infants and those with mental defects.) The "death penalty" reigned over humanity from Adam to Moses because it was God's judgment (condemnation, vv. 16, 18) on the sin of those generations, which sin is traceable to Adam.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

c. We know that our "old man" was crucified with Jesus in our sharing in the death he died once for all. That "old man" is the "man" of the old age, the man under the tyranny of sin and death. As John Stott says, "what was crucified was not a part of me called my old nature, but the whole of me as I was before I was converted." The "old man" is one who exists in Adam; the "new man" is one who exists in Christ.

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

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

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

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

f. Though his death was "to sin," the life Christ lives is "to God." His sin-bearing (for us) is finished (he was made sin for us – 2 Cor. 5:21); his subjection to the power of sin as sin-bearer is over. He now lives "to God" in that having finished his role as sin-bearer he forever lives free from that temporary intrusion of our sin into his relationship with the Father ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). So also, Christians are constantly to *regard themselves* as being dead to sin but alive to God. We must continually lay hold of this reality; we must no longer see ourselves in our relationship to sin as we were outside of Christ. We must see ourselves as having died in Christ to sin's loss, as having been freed from its claim on us, and as being in a relationship with God that no longer suffers from sin's alienating effect.

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

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

(2) Moo states (p. 383):

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

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

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

(a) Kruse states (p. 269-270):

To be 'under law' means to live under the regime of the Mosaic law, under the old covenant where the law was something written on tables of stone, and to be 'under grace' is to live under the new covenant, where the law is written on the human heart (cf. 2 Cor 3:3). What was impossible under the regime of the Mosaic law (the fulfillment of the law's own demands) because of humanity's weakness is made possible under the new covenant because of the renewing and transforming power of the Spirit (cf. 8:3-4; Gal 3:23-25; 4:1-7; 5:18). While believers who live under the new covenant of grace no longer live under the Mosaic law as a regime, this does not mean that they are free to flout the moral imperatives found in the law, for these are the moral standards required of humankind by God himself. In fact, in

those who walk by the Spirit the 'just requirement' of the law if fulfilled (8:4), for, as Paul says in 13:9, 'the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not murder", "You shall not steal", "You shall not covet", and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (cf. Gal 5:14), and, of course, love is included in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

(b) Schreiner states (p. 327): "Paul's point is that Israel did not keep the law as long as they were under the law (i.e., the Mosaic covenant). Now that believers are under the power of grace they are enabled to keep the moral norms of the law by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4). This is precisely what both Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (11:19-20; 36:26-27) foresaw occurring when the new covenant became a reality."

(c) But as I have already indicated, even though we as Christians are empowered to obey these ethical norms in a new way, we do "not yet" do so perfectly. Until the Lord's return, we live in the overlap of the old and new ages, in which we possess a down-payment on the fullness of life yet to come. On that Day our sanctification will be completed, and we who are now being transformed into the image of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18) will be like him (1 Jn. 3:2).

(d) As Moo notes (p. 390), "The paragraph that began with the question, 'Should we remain in sin in order that grace may increase?' ends with the glad tidings that we are under grace in order that sin may be overcome."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

g. For if you serve sin, the wage it pays is death. Grant Osborne remarks (p. 166), "death here is both the physical death that ends earthly life and the eternal death that follows, though the latter is primary." But if you serve God, he gives the gift of eternal life (and all that entails) in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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

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

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

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

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

c. Paul asks if those with knowledge of the law are ignorant of the fact that the Mosaic law, like law in general, applied only to the living. A rabbinic saying, which may have been known at this time, was: "if a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments."

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

e. The point is that just as the wife was freed to be joined to another by her husband's death, so those championing the Mosaic law had been freed to be joined to Christ by

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

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

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

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

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

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

(1) In saying that the effect of the law was to increase trespasses (5:20) and to arouse sinful passions (7:5), Paul was no doubt accused of saying that the law was evil and sinful. That, of course, would destroy any continuity between the law and his gospel, between the old and new covenants, between Moses and Christ, and would thus be a theological kiss of death. Paul flatly rejects the claim that he is saying the law is sinful. The law is not itself sin, but the law and sin do have a definite relationship.

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

(3) When Paul says (7:8b), after noting how sin exploits the command to its own evil purpose, "For apart from law, sin is dead," he means it is "dead" only in terms of its ability to use the law to stimulate sin, to arouse sinful passions. That particular work of sin requires the law. He certainly does not mean that sin is harmless or absolutely inactive apart from the law because he has already explained how *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23), even those not under law (specific, revealed commandments), and how death reigned (through sin) even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression (5:13-14).

(4) At one time, Paul was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came sin came to life and he died. I think Paul is referring to a time in his childhood before he was accountable for obeying the law. As soon as he was properly aware, the law became applicable to him and sin living in him sprang into action producing transgression and consequent death.

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

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

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

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

**<sup>13</sup>Did, then, that which is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin [did], in order that it might appear to be sin, producing death in me through that which is good in order that through the commandment sin might become sinful beyond measure. <sup>14</sup>For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, having been sold under sin. <sup>15</sup>For I do not know what I carry out; for I**



**do not practice what I will; rather, I do what I hate. <sup>16</sup>But if I do what I do not will, I agree with the law that [it is] good. <sup>17</sup>But now it is no longer I carrying it out, but sin dwelling in me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for to will [the good] is present in me, but to carry out the good is not. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good that I will; rather, I practice the evil that I do not will. <sup>20</sup>But if I do what I do not will, it is no longer I carrying it out but sin living in me.**

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

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

(2) Sin's evil work of using the good law to produce death was used to serve the good purpose of revealing the utter sinfulness of sin. Allowing sin to play this hand helped to expose sin as the wicked and ferocious power that it is.

(3) Elaboration on sin's work in bringing about transgression through the law (7:14-25).

(a) The law is spiritual, meaning in harmony with God (of the Spirit), but we humans (Paul refers to himself as a representative person) are not that way. We are "fleshly," oriented away from God, in that we have been "sold under sin." This is mankind's condition in Adam, not in Christ (6:2, 6-7, 11, 14, 17-18, 22). (1 Cor. 3:1 shows that Christians can *choose* to be "fleshly," can fail to appropriate their emancipation [see also, Rom. 6:12-13], but that is different than never having been emancipated.)

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

(c) As Paul looks back on his pre-Christian sin, with the post-Christian knowledge that mercy was no longer available under the old covenant, he expresses the

anguish of a condemned man. Who will save him? Thanks be to God through the Christ who saved him.

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

(4) I previously quoted this remark by James Dunn about Paul's discussion here (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 113): "The issue of personal responsibility [Paul] tried to resolve by depicting 'sin' as a power which fully masters the fleshly 'I' (7.14), without really denying the 'I' 's part in the evil it does or exculpating its failure to do the good (7.14-23)."

(5) Gordon Fee writes in *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (p. 511), "There are three matters which seem overwhelmingly to favor the view that Paul is here describing life before and outside of Christ, but from the perspective of one who is now in Christ." These may be summarized as (1) the only questions raised by Paul here have to do with life under the law, not with life in Christ, which clearly is not under the law, (2) the Spirit, who is key to living under the new covenant, is not mentioned, and (3) the description of this person as being sold under sin and thoroughly captivated by it is completely incompatible with Paul's view of life in Christ, which is a victorious life that is empowered by the Spirit and no longer enslaved to sin.

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

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

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

(7) The fact Paul is here speaking of the non-Christian's experience does not mean that Christians don't struggle with sin. As I've already stated, as long as we live in this overlap of ages, in this time before the Second Coming, the new man in Christ continues to be

subject to the influences of the powers of the old age. We still are pulled, tempted to live in Adam, and we must continually resist that temptation. Thus, Peter in 1 Pet. 2:11 warns the saints "to abstain from fleshly desires which war against the soul." But we do so as people who have been freed from enslavement to sin; we fight as those who have been healed of our "addiction to sin." And we do so in the power of the Spirit, as Paul will emphasize in chapter 8. We are not the same person in a new situation; we are a new person in a new situation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) Christians are not under condemnation because the principle that applies to them, that governs their situation, is "the law of the Spirit of life." Pursuant to that "law,"

they have received righteousness and life. (I think he calls it the "law of the Spirit of life" rather than the order or purpose or working of God for rhetorical reasons.) As one enters the new age of the Spirit, as one comes under the new covenant, one is freed from the governing principle of the old age, "the law of sin and death." In Christ, the former displaces the latter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(a) To become a Christian means to be transferred from the realm dominated by the flesh to the realm dominated by the Spirit. "Flesh" and "Spirit" stand over against each other, not as parts of a person but as the powers or dominating features of the two "realms" of existence. Paul writes in Gal. 5:16-18: <sup>16</sup>*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will in no*

way carry out the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh desires [things] contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit [desires things] contrary to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

(b) Moo states (p. 485):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(d) It is a mistake to conclude from this inability to please God while "in the flesh" that one is unable to respond to the gospel while "in the flesh." The gospel is the power of God for salvation. It includes whatever is necessary to enable (but not demand) its proper acceptance. It is through that acceptance that the convert changes realms.

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

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

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

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

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

they continue to put to death the misdeeds (lit. practices) of the body by the power of the Spirit, they will have full spiritual life.

(a) You see, there is no salvation without sanctification, not because holy living is the basis of our relationship with God but because it is the result of that relationship. If we refuse to be serious about our service to God, we have chosen not to be serious about God himself. Douglas Moo (p. 495) has this to say:

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

(b) It is also important to note that, though we are responsible for this mortification of sins, it is accomplished through the Spirit. Quoting Moo again (p. 495-496):

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

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

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

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

b. The Spirit received by Christians is not a spirit of slavery, one that leads again to anxiety or an unhealthy fear before God as a slave might have before a harsh master, but

the Holy Spirit, a Spirit of adoption. The Spirit engenders within us an awareness of our sonship, which awareness we express in heartfelt prayers and praise, represented by the cry "Abba, Father."

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

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

c. And the fact we are God's children means we are also his heirs. In other words, we are slated to inherit at some future point the blessings God has promised. The statement that we are "fellow-heirs with Christ" reminds us that our inheritance comes only through and in Christ. As Moo says (p. 505), "We, 'the sons of God,' are such only by virtue of our belonging to *the* Son of God; and we are heirs of God only by virtue of our union with the one who is heir of all God's promises (see Mark. 12:1-12; Gal. 3:18-19; Heb. 1:2)."

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

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

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



**<sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, through endurance we eagerly await [it].**

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

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

(1) Here I think he moves beyond suffering directly connected to our confession, to our being Christians, to all suffering attendant to our existence in this fallen world. (As Moo points out (p. 511), "The 'travail' of creation, with which the sufferings of Christians are compared [vv. 19-22], cannot be restricted to the sufferings 'on behalf of Christ.'")

(2) Kruse remarks (p. 341-342), "Our future glory will include a glorious resurrection body: the present mortal body will die, sown, as it were, in dishonor to be raised in glory (1 Cor 15:43), for when Christ appears he will 'transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:21)."

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

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

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

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

(b) As Kruse observes (p. 344): "What is clear from all this is that Paul's understanding of salvation is not restricted to humanity but encompasses the whole cosmos. Believers will enter their glorious freedom as children of God, and the cosmos too will be renewed." This same idea of salvation encompassing the cosmos is present in Eph. 1:9-10.

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

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

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

(1) The Spirit himself intercedes for us with "unspoken groanings." This is a metaphorical reference to the Spirit's ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts in a manner imperceptible to us. He expresses intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God. Moo remarks (p. 526), "When we do not know what to pray for – yes, even when we pray for things that are not best for us – we need not despair, for we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession 'on our behalf.'"

(2) God, who sees into the inner being of people, where the indwelling Spirit's ministry of intercession takes place, knows that the Spirit is interceding on behalf of saints in accordance with God's will. So Christ intercedes for us in heaven, defending us from all

charges that could be brought against us, and the Spirit intercedes for us in our hearts throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of life on earth.

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

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

(a) In this context, the comment that Christians are destined to be "conformed to the likeness of his Son" refers, at least primarily, to the fact our bodies will be transformed so that "they will be like [Jesus'] glorious body" (Phil. 3:21; see also, 1 Cor. 15:49 [And just as we bore the image of the man of dust, so we will also bear the image of the heavenly man] and 1 Jn. 3:2 [when he is revealed, we will be like him]).

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

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

(3) To paraphrase Paul's words in vv. 29-30, those God knew in advance would be Christians (and remain faithful, which Paul assumes Christians will do), he determined in advance would be glorified. And those he determined in advance would be glorified (i.e., Christians), these he also called to faith through the preaching of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; Rom. 10:17). God's calling and our response was simply the actualization of his foreknowledge that we would be Christians, the outworking of what he knew from the beginning. Those called to faith were pronounced righteous, as Paul has said repeatedly of believers, and those who have been pronounced righteous will be glorified in accordance with his prior determination to do so.

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

(b) He refers to this future glorification at the end of v. 30 in the past tense (aorist) because God has already determined to do this for Christians. As we might

say, it is a "done deal," the certainty of which is highlighted by referring to it as if it already occurred.

(c) It is also possible, though I think less likely in this context, that Paul uses the past tense because our glorification that will be finalized at Christ's return in our resurrection is a process of transformation that has already begun (2 Cor. 3:18).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Paul says absolutely not. Yes, God promised to bless "Israel," but "Israel" is not defined in terms of mere physical descent (see also Rom. 2:28-29, 4:11-12, 16; Gal. 3:7, 29). God distinguishes between descendants (Isaac and Ishmael) from the same man (Abraham, by Sarah and Hagar) – even between twins (Jacob and Esau), those who descended from the same man (Isaac) and same woman (Rebekah) *in the same act of intercourse* – according to his grace, not according to their merit. God is not obligated to treat all of Abraham's physical descendants the same. He decides on whom he will bestow favor, and the promise of blessing applied only to *believing* Israel. The others, Israel according to the flesh, were not the "true Israel" he had in mind.

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

4. Note that the reference to God's gracious choice of Jacob over Esau as "love vs. hate" is a Semitic idiom for preferring or choosing one over another. (See, Stein, *Playing By the Rules*, 118-120). The prophecy that Esau would serve Jacob was fulfilled in the nations that came from them, Edom and Israel.

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

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

1. The fact God blesses some undeserving Jews (the believers) but not others (the unbelievers) does not make him unjust. As he told Moses, the granting of mercy is not an issue of justice; it is solely a matter of his good will.

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

3. Mercy and compassion cannot, by determination or effort, be made a matter of right or entitlement; it is inherently a matter of God's gracious choice. And since every Jew recognized that God was not unjust in using (through "hardening") sinful and unbelieving Pharaoh to achieve his purposes, they should realize there is no basis for accusing God of injustice in doing the same with them. God is free to judge unbelieving Israel by hardening them in their unbelief, and he is free to use "hardened Israel" as an occasion for his name to be proclaimed to Gentiles, to be proclaimed in all the earth.

4. So God determines who gets mercy and who does not, who gets compassion and who gets hardened in their unbelief so as to serve his gracious purpose. Believing Israel, true Israel, received the former, and unbelieving Israel, Israel according to the flesh, received the latter (as is made clear in chapter 11). No one can dictate to God how his mercy and judgment must be expressed. He is free to judge unbelieving Israel, and he is free to show mercy to all who respond to the gospel. (See Glen Shellrude, *Evangelical Quarterly* 81.4 [2009], 313-314.)

5. As a footnote, though God foretold to Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21, 7:3), he did do so only after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32).

a. "Hardening" is a judicial act, an abandoning of the rebel to his own stubbornness, much like God's wrath against the ungodly is expressed in chapter 1 by "giving them over" to their own depravity. It is a sealing of a situation arising from a creature's rejection of divine invitation.

b. How this hardening is accomplished is not spelled out. In some cases, it may be that God withholds pressures to change that he otherwise may have graciously provided. In some cases, it may be that God forces one to choose when he knows that the person will choose contrary to the good. In some cases, it may be that God presents the rebel with circumstances that embolden him in his rebellion.

D. God's use of unbelieving Israel doesn't make them blameless (9:19-23)

**<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will?" <sup>20</sup>O man, on the contrary, who are you who answers back to God? Will the formed thing say to the one having formed [it], "Why did you make me like this?" <sup>21</sup>Or does the potter not have the authority over the clay to make**



**from the same lump this vessel for honor but that one for dishonor? <sup>22</sup>But what if God, wanting to show the wrath and to make known his power, bore with much patience vessels of wrath, having been made ready for destruction, <sup>23</sup>and in order that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory?**

1. A Jewish objector will claim that if unbelieving Israel is serving God's purpose, then God is wrong to blame them because they're really doing what he wants them to do. Paul says "on the contrary" and then rebukes the objector's presumptuous attitude. Jack Cottrell, after noting that the potter and clay analogy is used in Jer. 18:5-6 with specific reference to the nation of Israel, summarizes Paul's rebuke as "Whoa! Let's not forget who we are, shall we? Remember: God is the potter; you (Israel) are just clay in his hands. Who do you think you are, to challenge the one who formed you in the first place?"

2. Just as a potter has the right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for honor and another for dishonor, so God has the right to make from the same nation of Israel, the same lineage, one group for honor (true Israel) and another for dishonor (Israel of the flesh). He has the right to distinguish between things created from the same source or ancestor. As Paul made clear in 9:6-8, and as he develops later in chapter 9 and in chapters 10 and 11, God has chosen to fashion the two vessels from the nation of Israel by calling them to faith in Christ through the gospel, which produced different responses from individuals.

3. In vv. 22-23, Paul says, in essence, "So what if God, though wanting to pour out his wrath on unbelieving Israel, bore with them patiently in order to use them for his gracious purpose of bringing forth vessels of mercy, bringing to faith all who will respond (those foreknown, prepared beforehand for glory), so that he might make known the richness of his blessings upon them? Does this explain and excuse your sin? Does this shift responsibility for your condemnation to God? No!"

4. Cottrell concludes:

It is important to see that the ultimate purpose of God is not wrath, but mercy. He used vessels of wrath (unbelieving Israel) to accomplish this purpose, but the purpose itself is to make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy. And here is the most glorious truth of all: no unbelieving Jew – no individual vessel of wrath – needs to remain as such. Though the nation in general remains under God's curse because of unbelief, any individual Jew can respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and *become* a vessel of mercy! After all, the gospel is "first for the Jew" (1:16).

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

<sup>24</sup>These he also called, even us, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles, <sup>25</sup>as indeed he says in Hosea, "I will call those not my people my people and her not loved loved; <sup>26</sup>and it will be in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called sons of the living God." <sup>27</sup>But Isaiah cries out on behalf of Israel, "If the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, [only] the remnant will be saved; <sup>28</sup>for the Lord will act on the earth by carrying out [his] word, by limiting [the number]." <sup>29</sup>And just as Isaiah had told beforehand, "If the Lord of armies had not left us seed, we would have become like Sodom and would have been made like Gomorrah."

<sup>30</sup>What then shall we say? That Gentiles who do not pursue righteousness acquired righteousness, but righteousness that is from faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, did not attain the law. <sup>32</sup>Why? Because [they pursued] not from faith but as from works. They stumbled over the stone of stumbling, <sup>33</sup>just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and the one who believes on him will not be put to shame."

1. Having raised the matter of the predestined (those prepared beforehand for glory, those whose salvation was foreknown by God), Paul elaborates on the group's composition. Those predestined for this glory, the believers, were called by God (through the gospel), not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles, as God prefigured in Hosea (the church being the fulfillment of O.T. predictions of a renewed Israel).

2. Yet, as Isaiah foretold, only a remnant of Israel will be saved, and even that would have been wiped out but for God (in calling them to faith).

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

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

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

**<sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**

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

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

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

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

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

b. As I said some weeks ago, the "law," as the complete set of commands under the Mosaic covenant, is no longer in force, but the moral norms included among those commands have continuing validity and find full expression under the new covenant. That some commands included within the Mosaic law have ongoing validity while others do not is evident from 1 Cor. 7:19, where Paul says that circumcision is nothing but keeping God's commandments is everything.

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

law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law, centered in love, that is the "law of Christ." 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 (with 5:14).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. That message is in the hearts and mouths of the saints because righteousness/salvation is received through believing in the heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, which event bears witness to the efficacy of his death, and confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord.

a. Paul mentions only the belief and confession aspects of conversion because he is paralleling the use of mouth and heart in the quote from Deut. 30:14. He does not mean by this to exclude repentance or baptism. Conversion is a package, and sometimes one or more aspects are mentioned without the others. Paul has already made clear the significance of baptism in conversion in 6:1-11.

b. Indeed, as Baptist scholar G. R. Beasley-Murray notes in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 61, "It is universally acknowledged that 'Jesus is Lord' is the primitive confession of faith in Christ that was made at baptism."

5. As Scripture indicates, this salvation is available to all who believe on him, to all who call on his name, whether Jew or Gentile.

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

**<sup>14</sup>How then can they call on [one] in whom they did not believe? And how can they believe [on one] whom they did not hear? And how can they hear without one preaching? <sup>15</sup>And how can they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How welcome are the feet of those proclaiming good news of good things!" <sup>16</sup>But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who believed our message?" <sup>17</sup>So then, faith [comes] from hearing, and hearing [comes] through the word of Christ. <sup>18</sup>But I say, did they not hear? On the contrary, "their voice went out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." <sup>19</sup>But I say, did not Israel know? First, Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by a non-nation; by a senseless nation I will make you angry." <sup>20</sup>And Isaiah is bold and says, "I was found by those who do not seek me; I became visible to those who do not ask [for] me." <sup>21</sup>But concerning Israel he says, "All the day [long] I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."**

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

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

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

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

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

6. This Jewish "hearing" of the gospel was not the hearing of a message they could not understand. Not at all. As Moses and Isaiah indicated, the gospel was grasped by a non-nation, a senseless nation, by those who were not seeking or asking for God. The Jews therefore cannot justifiably plead lack of comprehension. Their lack of comprehension was willful – God appealed to them, but they were stubborn and obstinate. As Cranfield (*Shorter Commentary*, 264) notes:

The excuse of ignorance cannot be sustained. But it is to be noted that Paul is not withdrawing what he has said in vv. 2-3. The truth is that in one sense they know and in another sense they do not know. They have been the recipients of God's special self-revelation, and yet they have been uncomprehending. . . . The ignorance which is blameworthy has been characteristic of them; but the ignorance which would have constituted an excuse they cannot claim.

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

**I ask, therefore, did God reject his people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, from seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>God did not reject his people whom he foreknew. Or do you not know what the scripture says in**

[the section about] Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? <sup>3</sup>"Lord, they killed your prophets; they tore down your altars; I alone was left, and they are seeking my life." <sup>4</sup>But what did the divine utterance say to him? "I reserved for myself seven thousand men who did not bow a knee to Baal." <sup>5</sup>Therefore, so also in the present time a remnant has come into being according to a selection of grace. <sup>6</sup>But if by grace, [it is] no longer from works, for otherwise grace no longer is grace.

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

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

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

3. Israel as a whole, Israel of the flesh, did not obtain the righteous status it sought, but those who submitted to the righteousness of faith in Christ did obtain it. The rest, the unbelieving, were strengthened in their unbelief, sealed in their rejection of God's invitation so as to serve the divine purpose explained in the next section.

#### J. Unbelieving Jews are not beyond converting (11:11-16)

<sup>11</sup>I ask, therefore, did they stumble so that they might fall? Absolutely not! But by their trespass salvation [comes] to the Gentiles in order to provoke them to jealousy. <sup>12</sup>And if their trespass [means] riches for the world and their failure [means] riches for the Gentiles, even more their fulfilling [will mean]. <sup>13</sup>(I am speaking to you Gentiles.) So then, inasmuch as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry, <sup>14</sup>if somehow I may provoke my kindred to jealousy and save some of them. <sup>15</sup>For if the rejection of them [means] the reconciliation of the world, what [will] the acceptance [of them mean] except life from the dead? <sup>16</sup>If the firstfruits are holy, so is the lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

1. The purpose of God's hardening of unbelieving Israel was not to fix their fate by freezing them in their unbelief. God has not written them off. On the contrary, the hardening was

intended ultimately to convert those Jews by promoting Gentile salvation and thereby provoking the Jews to faith through "jealousy."

2. It was God's evangelism strategy among the unbelieving Jews, his way of adding to or maximizing the remnant. After all, if their trespass/failure/rejection meant riches/reconciliation for the world, then their fulfilling/acceptance will mean something even more, something beyond that; it will mean their salvation, their receiving life from the dead. Unbelieving Jews, therefore, cannot be ignored by the church.

a. Paul's use of the word πλήρωμα in v. 12, usually translated "fullness," is important because it sheds light on the meaning of the word in v. 25. Many take it to mean "the full number" and thus to be a reference to "the full number" of Jews who are going to convert to Christ, but that does not seem to me to fit the context very well.

b. The contrast is between Jewish trespass, failure, and rejection of the gospel, which brings blessings to the non-Jewish world, and Jewish πλήρωμα and acceptance of the gospel, which adds the blessing of an enlarged Jewish remnant. Since πλήρωμα is contrasted to "trespass" and "failure" and is associated with "acceptance," it seems the meaning "fulfilling" is best. In other words, if the Jews' trespassing against the command to believe in Jesus (by rejecting the gospel) means blessings for the Gentiles, then their fulfilling that command (by accepting the gospel) will mean additional blessings (i.e., enlargement of the Jewish remnant on top of the Gentiles who have come to faith).

c. The meaning "fulfilling" is one of the options given in BDAG for this verse, and it has this nuance in 13:10.

3. If they become (by faith) part of the lump from which the holy firstfruits (probably the patriarchs) were taken, they also are holy. If they become (by faith) a branch of a tree with holy roots, they also are holy (see vv. 23-24).

K. Alienation of Jews does not mean Gentiles are a superior race in God's eyes (11:17-24)

**<sup>17</sup>But if some of the branches were broken off and you, though being a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among them and became a sharer of the rich root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup>do not boast over the branches. But if you do boast, [remember] you do not support the root but the root [supports] you. <sup>19</sup>You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I may be grafted in." <sup>20</sup>Quite right; they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not think haughty thoughts, but be afraid. <sup>21</sup>For if God did not spare the natural branches, [perhaps] neither will he spare you. <sup>22</sup>Notice then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who fell but God's kindness toward**



**you, if you continue in [his] kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off. <sup>23</sup>And those also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup>For if you were cut from a naturally wild olive tree and, contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, even more will these, the natural [branches], be grafted into their own olive tree.**

1. It is true that some Jews were removed from the people of God by their rejection of Christ and some Gentiles were added by their acceptance of Christ, but the Gentile must not consider his race superior in God's sight because of this. After all, the church is Jewish at its root.

2. Moreover, the differing circumstance of Jews and Gentiles is not about race but about faith. If the Gentile does not continue in belief, he will be cut off just as was the unbelieving Jew. If the unbelieving Jew does not continue in unbelief, he will be grafted back into the people of God (the saved).

#### L. Understanding God's plan precludes Gentile arrogance (11:25-32)

**<sup>25</sup>For I do not want you, brothers, to be ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a hardening in part has come to Israel until the fulfilling of the Gentiles happens; <sup>26</sup>and in this way all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn ungodliness from Jacob. <sup>27</sup>And this [will be] my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." <sup>28</sup>With reference to the gospel, [they are] enemies on account of you; but with reference to the selection, [they are] beloved on account of the fathers; <sup>29</sup>for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup>For as you formerly were disobedient to God, but have now received mercy by their disobedience, <sup>31</sup>so also they have now been disobedient for your mercy, in order that they also may [now] receive mercy. <sup>32</sup>For God imprisoned everyone in disobedience, so that he might have mercy on everyone.**

1. Many scholars see this as a reference to a large-scale turning of Jews to the Christian faith at the end time, but I do not believe that view is correct. As I said in relation to Rom. 9:6-13, if the promises were not addressed to unbelieving Israel, and Paul says they were not, then God's faithfulness is not called into question by unbelieving Jews who do not inherit salvation. And if the promises *were* addressed to all physical Israelites, regardless of faith, then an end-time conversion of the last generation of Israelites would not answer the charge of unfaithfulness to all the preceding generations that were lost.

2. Paul says that a hardening was upon part of Israel until (and so that) the Gentiles' "fulfilling" (their accepting of Christ, recall 11:12) "happens" (one of the meanings of εἰσέρχουμαι in BDAG), and through this process "all Israel will be saved."

a. In other words, the three-step process of Jewish hardening, Gentile faith, and Jewish jealousy leads to the enlargement of the believing Jewish remnant, to the inclusion within "true Israel" of those Jews who were originally resistant but who were foreseen by God to believe, foreseen as "true Israel."

b. Without this process, some would not have been included within Israel, and thus "all Israel," defined in terms of God's foreknowledge, would not have been saved. Of course, if God had not planned this three-step process, then those Jews would not have been foreseen by God to believe, but Paul is not looking at it that way.

c. This Gentile "fulfilling" means that the gospel had spread to the nations. The church had been established among the Gentiles to an extent great enough to produce Jewish jealousy. That this was already in operation is suggested by the fact Paul says in v. 14 that he is hoping to save some Jews through jealousy, and by the fact v. 31 speaks of the Jews *now* receiving mercy (textual issue but most scholars think "now" is original).

d. In other words, the hardening of those Jews who initially rejected the gospel was temporary to invigorate the Gentile mission and thus to produce Jewish jealousy, which in turn served to help bring some of those initial rejecters, who were once hardened, to conversion. With the purpose of the hardening achieved in the "fulfilling of the Gentiles," that is, with Gentile acceptance reaching the extent sufficient to produce jealousy, it was lifted and some who were once hardened in their unbelief came to faith. But that number remains relatively few. As shown in Acts 28:22-28, which occurs years later during Paul's first Roman imprisonment, some Jews accept the message while others reject it, and though this rejection still contributes to the Gentile mission, the hardening was used to accelerate that mission to the point sufficient to create Jewish jealousy, which was achieved in the first century.

3. With reference to the gospel, these hardened Jews who ultimately convert (via the "Gentile effect") are enemies for the benefit of Gentiles, but with reference to the election, they are beloved on account of the fathers – when God called the patriarchs he promised to bless them and their (faithful) descendants, and his gifts and call are irrevocable.

4. God handed both the groups, Jews and Gentiles, over to disobedience, meaning he hardened them or let them go their way, as part of his way of bestowing mercy on both groups. The disobedient Gentiles received mercy through the disobedience of the Jews, and this happened that the disobedient Jews might also receive mercy through the once disobedient Gentiles.

#### M. Doxology (11:33-36)

**<sup>33</sup>O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and incomprehensible his ways! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? <sup>35</sup>Or who has**

**given in advance to him that it will be repaid to him? <sup>36</sup>For all things are from him and through him and to him! To him be the glory forever, amen.**

1. This wonder of God's working that has been revealed just blows Paul's mind. He breaks out in an emotional expression of praise and adoration.

2. God's wisdom and ways of working simply are beyond our comprehension. All we can do as creatures is to receive what he reveals and bow before him in awe. God is not on trial. To him be the glory forever, amen.

## *V. Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1-13:14)*

### A. The general call to a transformed life (12:1-2)

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – living, holy, and acceptable to God – which is your understanding service. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewal of the mind so that you may ascertain what is the will of God, the thing that is good and acceptable and perfect.**

1. In light of the mercies (or compassions) of God, Paul urges them to present to God the "sacrifice" of a life that is dedicated to and pleasing to him.

a. The "mercies of God" refers to all that Paul has written about God's working, which he just summarized in 11:30-32. And it is in light of those mercies that he urges the saints to present their *bodies* as a sacrifice, meaning they are willingly to offer in devotion to God consecrated lives, lives in which the sinful practices of the *body* have been put to death by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). We are to use our bodies and direct their activities in paths of righteousness as an expression of gratitude and submission to God.

b. Paul says that this kind of living, this figurative sacrifice, is our "understanding (or reasonable) service" to God. It is the appropriate response of rational or reasoning creatures to the God of mercy. There is something grossly inappropriate for rational creatures not to give God his due as the Almighty.

(1) Isaiah 1:2-3 states (ESV): <sup>2</sup> *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. <sup>3</sup> The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."*

(2) Deut. 10:12-13 (ESV): <sup>12</sup> "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?"

c. There are translation issues regarding both words of the phrase (λογικὴν λατρείαν) that I have translated "understanding service."

(1) *Logikos* may mean spiritual, rational, appropriate, or reasonable (Mounce, 231, n. 8), and *latreia* may mean either service or worship (Morris, 434, n. 11). Most commentators understand *latreia* in this verse as "worship," but as Everett Harrison notes in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (p. 128), "worship" may be too restricted a rendering in this context. He favors "service" here because it covers the entire range of the Christian's life and activity.

(2) *Latreia* is translated "service" in 12:1 in the KJV, ERV, ASV, NKJV, NET, and in a footnote in ESV. The standard Greek lexicon, BDAG, suggests "thoughtful service" for the phrase (λογικὴν λατρείαν) in Rom. 12:1. The phrase is rendered "reasonable service" in the KJV, ERV, NKJV, and NET, "rational service" in the ESV footnote, and "spiritual service" in the ASV.

d. But even if one opts here to translate *latreia* as worship, I think it is a mistake to read Paul as saying there is no longer a place for more specific and direct acts of worship carried out at certain times and locations. Paul simply means that, as was true in the O.T., this more specific worship must be practiced as part of the wider worship or service embracing the whole of the Christian's life. Otherwise, it is unacceptable to God. As C. E. B. Cranfield says (II: 601-602) in his acclaimed commentary (his parenthetical comments omitted):

Paul's use of the word *latreia* implies that the true worship which God desires embraces the whole of the Christian's life from day to day. It implies that any cultic worship which is not accompanied by obedience in the ordinary affairs of life must be regarded as false worship, unacceptable to God. But it would be quite unjustifiable to argue that the logical implication of Paul's use of *latreia* here is that no room is left for a Christian cultic worship carried out at particular times and in particular places. Provided that such worship in the narrower sense is always practised as part of the wider worship embracing the whole of the Christian's living and is not thought of as something acceptable to God apart from obedience of life, there is nothing here to deny it its place in the life of the faithful.

e. Likewise, Michael Thompson, a lecturer in N.T. at Cambridge, remarks in "Romans 12:1-2 and Paul's Vision for Worship" in Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson, eds., *A Vision for the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 127:

The apostle urges a way of life as a whole, identified as a right-minded worship or service. In doing so, he no doubt expands our understanding of what kind of

worship God values. True worship is inseparably connected with Christian behaviour in general. But it is a logical fallacy to conclude from this text that he redefines worship as, or reduces worship to, Christian ethics – any more than Hosea's commendation of love and knowledge over sacrificial offerings (Hos. 6:6) proves that the prophet was calling for an absolute end to form and ritual.

f. Some people fear that by giving the worship assembly any kind of special significance we detract from the importance of daily faithful living and thus encourage a kind of ritualistic devotion. I don't think it's an either-or situation. I think we can catch the grandeur of our gatherings without falling prey to the idea that God cares *only* about our gatherings.

2. We are not to be molded to fit the godlessness of this age, but rather we are to be transformed by a Spiritual reprogramming of our minds so that we can ascertain the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God by which we are to live. Though the Greek word (δοκιμάζω) usually has the sense of "test, examine, approve," in 12:2 it shades into "ascertain" or "discern," which is how it is translated in the NEB, NJB, NRSV, ESV, and CSB. As James Dunn states, what is in view in Rom. 12:2 is the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgment at each given moment.

a. This reprogramming is an ongoing, lifelong process. In the vernacular, we constantly will be "getting our mind right."

b. The more we think as God wants us to think, the greater insight we will have into how God wants us to live. We will be able to comprehend more clearly and deeply God's moral direction.

## B. Humility and mutual service (12:3-8)

**<sup>3</sup>For I say, through the grace that was given to me, to all who are among you, not to think greater of yourselves than is necessary to think but to think so as to be sensible, as God distributed to each a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup>For just as in one body we have many members, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, the many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another, <sup>6</sup>but having different gifts according to the grace given to us; whether prophecy [exercised] in agreement with the faith, <sup>7</sup>or service [exercised] in the ministry; or the one who teaches [gifted] in teaching, <sup>8</sup>or the one who encourages [gifted] in encouragement; the one who shares, in generosity; the one who gives aid, in eagerness; the one who shows compassion, in cheerfulness.**

1. Part of God's will for our lives is that we not have an inflated view of own importance, especially in relation to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Rather, we are to gauge ourselves in relation to fellow saints by the "yardstick (or standard) of faith" (not the amount of

faith) which God has revealed to each of us in the gospel. This understanding of "measure of faith" is preferred by Cranfield, Morris, Fizmyer, and Moo.

a. In other words, faith is the thing that matters, and since we all stand before God through the same faith in Christ, evaluating by that standard eliminates false notions of superiority and inferiority that stratify the body of Christ. That is what is behind the saying the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

b. This is preferable to taking the term "measure" as a measured quantity of faith that is dispensed by God in different amounts to different individuals. That would promote rather than suppress notions of superiority and inferiority.

2. Paul backs up the exhortation that believers not have an inflated view of themselves by analogizing them to the human body. Christians are all part of the one body of Christ, but the various parts of that body perform different functions. Since all parts contribute to the whole, no particular part should see itself as superior.

a. I agree with James Dunn and Robert Jewett (and NRSV) that vv. 6-8 should not be translated as commands but as statements of the diversity of gifts within the body. That judgment is reflected in the translation given above.

b. Prophecy is to be exercised "in agreement with the faith" (the translation suggested by BDAG), in a way consistent with the Christian faith. I think this probably means in accordance with the kinds of conditions Paul mentioned in 1 Cor. 14:29-33a (<sup>29</sup>*And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern.* <sup>30</sup>*And if [something] is revealed to another who is sitting, let the first be silent.* <sup>31</sup>*For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be encouraged.* <sup>32</sup>*And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets,* <sup>33</sup>*for God is not [a God] of disorder but of peace.*)

c. I do not believe the Spirit is choosing to give the church today all the same gifts he gave to her in the first century. In other words, I believe some of the gifts have ceased, including the gift of prophecy. Regarding prophecy, consider the following:

(1) There is no indication that all gifts will continue until the consummation, so there is no reason *to insist* that they have. Since the Spirit distributes the gifts as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11), it is certainly possible that he chose to stop giving certain gifts. This kind of change is not unprecedented. It was widely believed by Jews that the gift of prophecy ceased not long after the last book of the O.T. was revealed.

(2) Eph. 2:20 indicates that both apostles and prophets played a foundational role in establishing the church. We know that the apostles passed from the scene after fulfilling that role, so one would expect the same thing to happen to the prophets. This is consistent with the concept of a foundation. They were the instruments of God's new revelation, and once that foundation had been laid, their job was complete; the church would then build on their message.

(3) The precedent of the O.T. supports the idea that the completion of N.T. Scriptures would have an effect on the work of the Spirit, particularly with regard to revelatory gifts. As mentioned, it was generally recognized in Judaism that divine inspiration ceased not long after the last book of the O.T. was revealed.

(4) This in no way means that God is any less powerful today than yesterday. It is not a matter of power but a matter of divine choice.

3. Of course, Paul's point has nothing to do with the duration of the spiritual gifts. He is supporting his exhortation that Christians not think too highly of themselves, especially in relationship to one another.

### C. General ethical counsel (12:9-21)

#### 1. Emphasis on Christian relationships (12:9-16)

**<sup>9</sup> Love is to be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love; show the way to one another in the matter of respect. <sup>11</sup> Do not be lazy in eagerness; be fervent in spirit; serve as a slave to the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be steadfast in affliction; persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share in the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Be like-minded toward one another; do not think haughty thoughts but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.**

a. Christian love is to be genuine, not fake. We are not to be two-faced where we act committed to another's welfare but then seek to harm them or simply harm them through neglect.

b. We are to hate (exceedingly) what is evil and cling to what is good. It is not virtuous to be apathetic toward or accepting of wickedness, and it is not loving to ignore evil in our brothers' and sisters' lives. Real love requires us not to wink at such things.

c. We are to have a family-like affection (or devotion) toward one another, and we are to show the way to one another in the matter of respect. We are not to treat any brother or sister as though they're "a nobody."

d. We are not to be lacking in zeal; rather, we are to be fervent in spirit. We are not to be "ho hum" about serving the Lord.

e. And our zeal is to be rightly directed (recall 10:2 – zeal not according to knowledge). With it, we are to "serve as a slave to the Lord." One aspect of that is being zealous in terms of the will of the Lord as revealed in Scripture, which we become better able to discern through the Spiritual reprogramming of our minds (12:3).

f. We are to rejoice in the hope that is ours in Christ, remain steadfast in the face of affliction, and persevere in prayer (which will certainly affect our doing the others).

g. We are to share our material things with saints in need. We are also to "pursue" hospitality, that is, go out of our way to welcome and provide for traveling brothers and sisters. Craig Keener comments in *The Bible Background Commentary*, "In antiquity 'hospitality' meant putting up travelers (without charge) in one's home while they were in town; they would normally carry letters from those trusted by their hosts, attesting that they were to be accepted as guests."

h. We are to bless those who persecute us, meaning we are to call on God to bestow his favor on them. This is the same thing Jesus said in Mat. 5:44 and Lk. 6:27-28.

i. We are to rejoice with our brothers and sisters who rejoice, and we are to weep with those who weep. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 12:26, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together." Genuine love will not respond to a fellow believer's joy with envy or bitterness. And genuine love will cause us to identify so deeply with our brothers and sisters in Christ that their sorrows will become ours.

j. Paul says in v. 16 that we are to "be like-minded *toward* one another" (rather than "among" or "along with" one another), which suggests that his point in this context is that, whatever our social, ethnic, or economic status, we are to view each other with a mutual respect and with a mutual appreciation of value and worth. The NEB translated the phrase: "have equal regard for one another" (see also NAB).

k. We are not to think we are too good for "humble duties" (if take adjective as neuter – lowly things) or "lowly people" (if take as masculine), rather we are to associate with them. We are not to have a "big head," not to be wise in our own estimation.

## 2. Emphasis on relationship with the world (12:17-21)

<sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil; have regard for what are noble things in the sight of all people. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people. <sup>19</sup>Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but give opportunity for the wrath [of God], for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord."  
<sup>20</sup>But "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for



**by doing this, you will heap coals of fire on his head." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

a. We are to repay no one evil for evil. And we are to exhibit to the world, in the sight of all people, our regard for noble things, our appreciation for and commitment to things that are good and right and holy and pure. We are to let our light shine in this dark world as disciples of the Lord Jesus. (An alternative view is that we are to have regard for what all people see as "noble things" that we might not be needlessly offensive.)

b. Though the world is opposed to us, we are to do all we can to live at peace with the world. We must not compromise what God has called us to be and do, but neither can we gratuitously alienate the lost.

c. When we are wronged, we are not to retaliate or seek revenge against the wrongdoer. Rather, we are to allow God to deal with them. Paul is not talking here about using courts to resolve civil disputes with non-Christians; he is talking about personal revenge and punishment.

(1) As he says in chapter 13, governmental authority has been established by God for the administration of justice, so I do not see how it would be against God's will to avail ourselves of it. It is only lawsuits against fellow believers that are wrong (1 Corinthians 6), as those disputes need to be resolved "in house" rather than be submitted to unspiritual judges who do not share the church's view of reality.

(2) Paul did not hesitate to use the rights he had under Roman law. He used the fact he had been illegally beaten to insist that he and Silas be personally escorted out of the jail in Philippi (Acts 16:35-39). He also appealed to have Caesar hear his case rather than allow himself to be handed over to the Jews by Governor Festus (Acts 25:6-12).

(3) Civil litigation is about compensation rather than punishment. (Of course, if civil litigation was employed for the purpose of retaliation or punishment that would be a sinful spirit.)

d. We are to love our enemies and seek their welfare that we might lead them to be ashamed of their conduct toward us and, perhaps, to repent and turn to the Lord whose love we embody. "Coals of fire" as a metaphor for "burning pangs of shame" may go back to an Egyptian practice of carrying a tray of burning coals on one's head as a sign of contrition, though other suggestions for the origin of the metaphor as a reference to shame have been proposed.

#### **D. Submission to secular rulers (13:1-7)**

**Let every person be subject to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except by God, and the existing ones have been established by God. <sup>2</sup>So then, the one who opposes the authority has resisted the ordinance of God, and those having resisted will receive judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For the rulers are not a cause for fear to good work but to evil. And do you want not to fear the authority? Do good, and you will have praise from him. <sup>4</sup>For he is God's servant to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not wear the sword for nothing. For he is God's servant, an avenger for wrath against the one practicing evil. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, it is necessary to be subject, not only on account of wrath but also on account of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For on account of this you also pay tribute; for they are God's ministers when attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Pay to everyone the debts owed: to the one [owed] the tribute, [pay] the tribute; to the one [owed] the tax, [pay] the tax; to the one [owed] fear, [pay] fear; to the one [owed] respect, [pay] respect.**

1. Part of the holy life we are to present to God in this overlap of ages is our submission to governing officials who have authority over us. One can well imagine Christians, who were reading the "now" too much in terms of the "not yet," arguing: "The old age has passed away; we are 'a new creation in Christ' and belong to the transcendent, spiritual realm. Surely we, who are even now reigning with Christ in his kingdom, need pay no attention to the secular authorities in this defunct age" (Moo, 791).

2. Paul says that Christians must submit to the governmental authorities because they have been established by God. To oppose them is to resist God's directive, his grant of authority to them, and those who do so will receive judgment. You see, God has established certain institutions in this world, such as marriage and government, which have a positive role to play *even after* the inauguration of the new age.

a. Our submission to the governmental authorities does not depend on their goodness. It depends only on the fact they are in the position of authority. See, 1 Pet. 2:13-17. Nero was the Emperor when Paul wrote this, and he certainly was an evil man.

b. God sometimes brings or allows evil people to come to power for various reasons. Paul has already mentioned (9:17) that God raised up the wicked Pharaoh that God might be glorified through displaying his power against him. And Jesus told Pilate in Jn. 19:11 that he would have no authority over him if it were not given to him from above. See also, Dan. 4:17, 25, 32.

c. But God holds these evil rulers accountable for their wickedness. Daniel 4 tells us that God caused the great king Nebuchadnezzar to lose his mind so that he wound up living like a wild animal. It was not until he repented that his rule was restored to him. And though God used the Assyrians to punish Israel and the Babylonians to punish Judah, he poured out his wrath on the wickedness of those nations (e.g., Isaiah 10; Habakkuk). Their ultimate punishment, of course, will be in the judgment.

d. It goes without saying that Christians cannot obey governmental authorities when to do so would mean disobeying God. As Peter and the other apostles declared to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men!" Otherwise, we would be placing government over God, which is idolatry. Paul does not mention that fact here because the issue was whether the saint should submit to the authority of the state at all.

e. There are notable examples in Scripture of this kind of civil disobedience.

(1) When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys, they refused to obey. Ex. 1:17

(2) When Nebuchadnezzar ordered all his subjects to fall down and worship his golden image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey. Daniel 3.

(3) When King Darius decreed that for thirty days no one should pray to any god or man, except himself, Daniel refused to obey. Daniel 6.

(4) When the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused to obey. Acts 4:18 ff.

3. The rulers do not cause fear in those who submit to their authority (do good work) but in those who rebel (do evil). If you wish not to fear the authority, then be a loyal citizen (do good), and you will be praised. For the authority is God's servant for your benefit (via maintaining social order).

a. It is clear from this that there is no inherent conflict between government employment and Christian discipleship. God established governmental authority within human society (to bless mankind by providing social order), so one who serves in the government is God's servant. To the extent one fulfills one's role in government consistently with Christian ethics, one is working with God not against him.

b. In Rom. 16:24, Erastus, one of the Christians who sends greetings to the saints in Rome, is identified as a financial officer within the local government of Corinth, the city from which Paul wrote. Likewise, in Phil. 4:22 those "who belong to Caesar's household" are among the Christians who send greetings to the saints in Philippi. Those Christians were members of the emperor's civil-service staff.

4. But if you rebel (do evil), be afraid, for he has the power to punish. For he is God's servant, an agent of wrath against the one practicing rebellion (evil).

a. This text is relevant to the question of whether the death penalty is immoral per se. There is debate over the exact background and significance of the phrase "wear the sword" in v. 4. Keener says in *The Bible Background Commentary*: "'The sword' refers to the

standard method of execution in this period (beheading); in earlier times the ax had been used. Swords were carried in front of Roman officials to indicate their authority over life and death."

b. But even if the phrase refers only to the right of the government to punish those who violate its laws, rather than referring directly to the infliction of the death penalty, Moo states: "[B]ut in the context of first-century Rome, and against the OT background (Gen. 9:4-6), Paul would clearly include the death penalty in the state's panoply of punishments for wrongdoing."

5. So it is necessary to be subject to the authority, not only because of potential punishment but also because of conscience (the authority having been established by God).

6. Paying tribute (direct taxes) is even a matter of conscience because authorities are God's ministers when attending to tax collection (or, perhaps more broadly, when attending to government service generally).

7. We are to pay to everyone the debts owed, whether direct taxes, indirect taxes (customs duties, fees, etc.), respect, or honor. Governments restrain anarchy and serve the basic needs of the masses, so it is no justification for withholding payment of taxes that they also use that money for things we cannot endorse. That is their responsibility. But, of course, in a system of government that gives us a voice in selecting our leaders and influencing their policies, we have an obligation, as stewards of that privilege, to exercise it for the good.

#### E. Love and the law (13:8-10)

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

1. Paul plays off his comment in v. 7 that every debt should be paid, and says the only exception is the debt to love one another. That is the one debt we must never stop owing. As the third-century theologian Origen put it, "Let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love – a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging."

2. If you love your neighbor, you will do him no harm. That means you will not commit adultery, you will not murder, you will not steal, you will not covet, or do anything like that. You see, all these commands are summed up in the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The commands are simply specific ways in which love does no harm, so love fulfills the law in that love does what the law demands.

3. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10; Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. These definite requirements are included within the "law," within the set of commands under the Mosaic covenant. So the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included within that law.

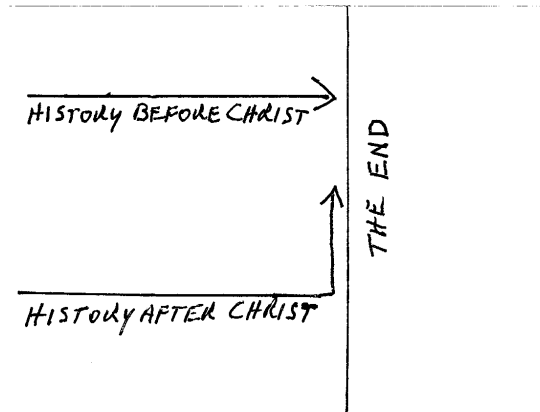
#### F. Living in light of the day (13:11-14)

**<sup>11</sup>And this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to be raised from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we [first] believed; <sup>12</sup>the night progressed, and the day has drawn near. Let us, therefore, put off the works of darkness, and let us put on the weapons of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us walk properly as in the day; not in orgies and instances of drunkenness, not in episodes of illicit sexual intercourse and acts of licentiousness, not in discord and jealousy; <sup>14</sup>but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not make provision for the lusts of the flesh.**

1. Now is no time to be lax in our discipleship because we are closer to the end (whenever that may be) than when we first believed. Each new day gives more reason to be diligent, not less. It's like the game Mr. Pop when you can't see the timer. Since you *know* it's coming, the longer you wait the greater the sense of urgency.

2. Verse 12a ("The night progressed, and the day has drawn near") may be a phrase from a traditional baptismal liturgy where the one entering the faith (when they "first believed") was told that, with Christ's coming and ministry, the day of salvation had been brought "near." In other words, it's not a statement that the consummation had "drawn near" while the Roman Christians had been waiting but that it had drawn near in the work of Christ. The former would imply the consummation was "near" in comparison to how long they had been waiting; the latter means only that it was "near" in a theological or eschatological sense.

a. The "day of salvation," meaning the consummated kingdom, was brought near with the ministry of Christ in that the last event in God's plan to secure the consummation had taken place. Since Christ's achievement, creation and history have been on the verge of the end, poised for the consummation, however long it should take to occur. This poorly drawn diagram gets at the idea. As long as this reality, history as we know it, continues, it does so on the brink of Christ's return and the consummation of all things. However long God in his purposes extends the time since Christ, Christ's coming is ever at our door.



b. As John Stott puts it:

[W]hat the apostles did know is that the kingdom of God came with Jesus, that the decisive salvation events which established it (his death, resurrection, exaltation and gift of the Spirit) had already taken place, and that God had nothing on his calendar before the parousia. It would be the next and the culminating event. So they were, and we are, living in "the last days." It is in this sense that Christ is coming "soon" (16:20). We must be watchful and alert, because we do not know the time.

3. Since the consummation is closer now than at any time in the past, we need, more than ever, to live in light of that day. There is no place for such things as sexual immorality, drunkenness, strife, and jealousy. Rather, we are to become more like Jesus and make no provision for the lusts of the flesh.

4. The sad fact is that so many Christians fail to take this seriously. Ronald Sider writes in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* (excerpted in *Books & Culture*, January/February 2005):

Once upon a time there was a great religion that over the centuries had spread all over the world. But in those lands where it had existed for the longest time, its adherents slowly grew complacent, lukewarm, and skeptical. Indeed, many of the leaders of its oldest groups even publicly rejected some of the religion's most basic beliefs.

In response, a renewal movement emerged, passionately championing the historic claims of the old religion and eagerly inviting unbelievers everywhere to embrace the ancient faith. Rejecting the skepticism of leaders who no longer believed in a God who works miracles, members of the renewal movement vigorously argued that their God not only had performed miraculous deeds in the past but still miraculously transforms all who believe. Indeed, a radical, miraculous "new birth" that began a lifetime of sweeping moral renewal and transformation was at

the center of their preaching. Over time, the renewal movement flourished to the point of becoming one of the most influential wings of the whole religion. . . .

Then the pollsters started conducting scientific polls of the general population. In spite of the renewal movement's proud claims to miraculous transformation, the polls showed that members of the movement divorced their spouses just as often as their secular neighbors. They beat their wives as often as their neighbors. They were almost as materialistic and even more racist than their pagan friends. The hard-core skeptics smiled in cynical amusement at this blatant hypocrisy. The general population was puzzled and disgusted. Many of the renewal movement's leaders simply stepped up the tempo of their now enormously successful, highly sophisticated promotional programs. Others wept.

This, alas, is roughly the situation of Western or at least American evangelicalism today.

Scandalous behavior is rapidly destroying American Christianity. By their daily activity, most "Christians" regularly commit treason. With their mouths they claim that Jesus is Lord, but with their actions they demonstrate allegiance to money, sex, and self-fulfillment.

## *VI. A Plea for Peace Among Jew and Gentile Christians (14:1-15:13)*

### *Background*

The most likely scenario for the founding of the church in Rome is that Jews who were converted on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10) brought their faith in Jesus back with them to their home synagogues. That faith then spread among the Jews and also among the "God fearers," Gentiles who were interested in Judaism and attended the synagogue without becoming Jews. By A.D. 57, when Paul wrote Romans, the church in that city was predominantly Gentile. That probably happened when Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49. Jewish Christians who returned after Claudius' death in A.D. 54 found themselves in the minority.

The O.T. prohibited Israelites from eating certain kinds of meat (Leviticus 11, 20:25; Deut. 14:3-21) and any meat not slaughtered in such a way as to drain the blood (Lev. 17:10-16, 19:26; Deut. 12:15-25), while only Nazirites and priests on duty were required to abstain from wine (Num. 6:2-4; Judg. 13:4-5; Amos 2:11-12; Lev. 10:9). Scrupulous Jews sometimes would avoid all meat when they were in an environment where they could not be sure of the kind of meat it was or how it had been prepared or used beforehand. Even wine sometimes was avoided out of fear it may have been tainted by idolatry, but the conflict in Rome seems centered on food (vv. 2-3, 6, 15, 20, 23) and holy days (vv. 5-6). Drinking may be mentioned in v. 17 simply because it is a natural

concomitant of eating, and wine may be mentioned in v. 21 as an extension of the principle enunciated with regard to the disagreement about food.

These dietary rules and observance of holy days, especially the Sabbath, were considered very important matters of Jewish faithfulness. They were central to maintaining the unique and separate status of the Jewish people.

When Jews became Christians, it was difficult for them to accept in their hearts that it was O.K. to eat the things they had long been taught were offensive to God and to accept that the prescribed holy days were not distinctively sacred. It was also hard because those rules were an important social link with their fellow Jews. This tension shows up in many places in the N.T.

Some Jews insisted that people must submit to the Mosaic law, in all its particulars, to be saved in Christ (e.g., Acts 15:1, 5). These are, of course, the Judaizers whom Paul so fiercely opposed in Galatians and elsewhere. Others, like those in Rome, continued to practice ritual aspects of Judaism as a matter of personal conscience, without making it a test of salvation (if they were Judaizers Paul would not have pleaded for them to be understood and accepted). Even among this group, however, there was a tendency to think that those not following the law were less faithful or less devoted to God, to hold them somewhat at a distance. Conversely, there was a tendency among those not following the law to look down on the lawkeepers as unenlightened and arrogant.

Romans 14:1-15:13 is a plea for peace among the Jewish and Gentile Christians. There no doubt were some Gentiles among the law keepers (converts to Judaism) and some Jews among those who recognized their freedom from the law, but for the most part the divide was between Jews and Gentiles.

#### A. The strong and weak must receive one another (14:1-12)

**But welcome the one who is weak in faith, [though] not for quarrels about opinions. <sup>2</sup>One person has the faith to eat everything, but the one who is weak eats [only] vegetables. <sup>3</sup>Let the one who eats not despise the one who does not eat, and let the one who does not eat not judge the one who eats, for God welcomed him. <sup>4</sup>Who are you who judge another's house slave? To his own lord he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. <sup>5</sup>[For] one person judges [one] day in preference to [another] day, but another person judges every day [alike]; let each be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup>The one who esteems the day, esteems [it] to the Lord; and the one who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who abstains from eating, abstains to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup>For none of us lives for himself, and none dies for himself; <sup>8</sup>for whether we live, we live for the Lord; and whether we die, we die for the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup>For to this end, Christ died and lived**



[again], so that he might exercise lordship over both the dead and the living.  
<sup>10</sup>But you, why do you judge your brother? or you too, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, <sup>11</sup>for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will acknowledge God." <sup>12</sup>So [then], each of us will give account of himself [to God].

1. In v. 1 Paul tells the Gentile majority that they are to welcome or receive the one who is "weak in faith," meaning the Jewish Christian who is weak in his grasp of the implications of the faith, who has underdeveloped convictions about what the faith allows.

a. These weak Christians are not merely to be tolerated but are to be accepted into the fellowship of the family of God. They are not to be mocked or disparaged for their convictions, as that would make them feel like outsiders.

b. Moreover, they are to be accepted with the right motivation and spirit. They are not to be received provisionally for the purpose of quarreling with them over their misguided convictions. That does not mean that teaching them is forbidden; it means that they are not to be received with the ulterior motive of setting them straight.

2. He says in vv. 2-4 that those whose faith is strong enough to eat meat are not to have a disdainful, condescending attitude toward the law-observing Jewish minority, but neither is the Jewish minority to judge those who eat meat, for God has welcomed them. Since God accepts the meat eaters, then so must the Jewish Christians. After all, it is the Lord's judgment of his servant that matters, and the meat eater will stand in the Lord's approval.

3. As I've said, Jewish and Gentile Christians differed in the observance of holy days and in the eating of meat. In vv. 5-6 Paul notes that the scrupulous Jew considered certain days, especially the Sabbath, as a distinctively holy day, whereas the Gentile believer considered all days equal in holiness. The scrupulous Jew also considered it wrong (or at least inferior or less pious) to eat meat or drink wine that may be ritually unclean. Paul says that either practice is acceptable as long as it is done with a clear conscience.

a. The practices of both the strong and the weak are acceptable to God because *neither is sinful*. The one who observes holy days and abstains from meat and wine because he erroneously, but sincerely, believes it is God's will to do so is doing more than the Lord requires by restricting his freedom. The one who correctly understands that the ritual or ceremonial aspects of the law are not binding on the Christian, is enjoying his freedom in the Lord. It is like circumcision: one is free to do it, but it is not sinful not to do it.

b. When something is sinful, however, it doesn't become acceptable just because the one doing it believes it is not sinful. Some in Corinth justified eating sacrificial food at the cultic meals in pagan temples; they even pressed for the right in the name of knowledge, but

Paul would have none of it (see esp. 1 Cor. 8:1-13 with 10:14-22). It is only when something is a matter of indifference to God that one's conscience is the controlling guide.

c. Of course, the scrupulous Jew believes at some level that this is a matter of God's will; that is why his conscience is disturbed by it. In this case, however, we know the scrupulous Jew is wrong because Paul tells us so, both implicitly, by the fact he labels the Jews "weak in faith" and leaves the issue as a matter of conscience (v. 5), and explicitly (vv. 14, 20).

d. There are a couple of facts worth noting that will help us think clearly about this in terms of current disputes among Christians.

(1) First, we have no apostle or inspired interpreter to answer definitively whether a disputed matter of personal conduct is in fact a matter of indifference to God. For the Christians in Rome, the issue was how they would treat one another in light of *the fact* revealed by the Spirit through Paul that consuming ritually contaminated meat and wine was a matter of indifference to God. For us, the issue often is how to treat one another in light of *an unresolved dispute* whether the conduct is a matter of indifference to God.

(2) Second, Paul is here addressing matters of personal conduct (eating meat, drinking wine, and esteeming certain days), not corporate worship practices. Though what he says here and especially in what follows has significant implications for respecting another's conscience in corporate worship, there is a difference between personal conduct and corporate worship.

(a) One who fails to persuade a brother that some aspect of his personal conduct is contrary to God's will has no concern that he is a participant in that brother's conduct. His question is whether he should continue to receive that person as a brother despite the disagreement.

(b) But corporate worship is a communal enterprise; it is something offered to God as a whole by a united body of believers not the separate offerings of individuals who happen to be in proximity to others. It is congregational not individual. So we all share in what the congregation accepts and willingly practices in its worship – it is *our* worship. If half the congregation strums guitars or blows police whistles, those not engaging in that conduct are implicated in it in a way they would not be if that same conduct was done personally or privately.

(c) That's why worship is always such a sensitive issue. As Howard Norton observed years ago (1993) in the *Christian Chronicle*:

The public worship assembly is critical to our unity as a brotherhood. It always has been. Because of this we must be exceedingly careful when we tamper with it in any way. We are very resilient in churches of Christ when the issues on which we disagree fall outside the public assembly of the saints. When controversial practices

enter the public assembly, however, everyone is affected; and the possibility for division and shattering is scary.

e. So what about disagreements today over Christian ethics? How are we to treat one another when we disagree over whether certain personal conduct is acceptable to God, given that there is no apostle to assure us that the conduct is in fact a matter of indifference to God?

(1) There is no easy answer to this, and there are many difficult cases, but the end of v. 3 seems crucial – "for God welcomed (or received) him." That says to me that before we can rightly refuse to accept a brother for engaging in conduct that he contends is acceptable to God, we must conclude that the conduct is condemned with sufficient clarity to warrant the presumption that engaging in it a denial of Christ's lordship.

(2) The question, it seems to me, is not whether I'm convinced that the conduct in question is wrong but whether I'm convinced that a "reasonable" or "good faith" handling of the word requires that conclusion. It's one thing to disagree over whether things like playing cards, social drinking, dancing, celebrating holidays, attending R-rated movies, or how to dress for corporate worship are matters of indifference to God; it's another thing to disagree over whether homosexual conduct is a matter of indifference to God.

4. Paul's suggestion that the observance of "holy days" is a matter of indifference to God raises several issues.

a. Is Paul denying that Sunday is an appointed day for Christians to gather for corporate worship?

(1) I don't think so. After all, Sunday is called "the Lord's Day" in Rev. 1:10, which shows that it is somehow distinctive from other days. In 1 Cor. 16:1-2 we see that Paul told both the Galatian churches and the Corinthians to set aside a sum of money for the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the first day of each week. And we see in Acts 20:7 that the saints gathered together on the first day of the week specifically to take the Lord's Supper ("to break bread").

(2) What Paul is saying is that, under the new covenant, the Jewish practice of considering certain days as distinctively *holy* is a matter of indifference to God. No day is holier than another to those in Christ; rather, all days are equally holy. So Christians are not obligated to observe the Sabbath or other Jewish holy days. The same truth is indicated in Gal. 4:9-10 and Col. 2:16-17. That means that those who seek to bind Sabbath observance on Christians are wrong, and if they are making it a test of salvation, they are lost.

(3) That the "Lord's Day" is an appointed day of Christian worship does not mean it is a more sacred day in the sense the Sabbath was a more sacred day. I realize that some believe Sunday is a Christianized version of the Jewish Sabbath, but I think that is incorrect. As Andrew T. Lincoln comments ("From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological

Perspective," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 389-90):

[T]he Lord's Day need not be understood in terms of a sacred day. . . . The day can be said to be the Lord's because it is the appropriate day for worshipping Him, and this is significantly different from the view that sees the day, by analogy with the Jewish Sabbath, as a full twenty-four hour period belonging to the Lord in a distinct way from that in which all the Christian's time belongs to the Lord. Whereas the latter is in conflict with the sentiment approved in Rom. 14:5, the former need by no means be. There is a sense in which all of life should be a prayer, and yet a recognition of this does not detract from the need for specific prayer at specific times. Similarly the notion that all of one's time is devoted to the Lord does not detract from the necessity of specific worship at specific times. To claim that specifically Sunday is the appropriate day for a gathering of the Christian community for worship is not to imply that somehow in itself that day is holy.

b. Is Paul saying that Christians are free to make up their own holy days and observe them? I don't think so. The holy days he was speaking about had been prescribed by God in the O.T. It is one thing for the Jew who had been trained in the law all his life to feel that observing these days was an honor to God; it is another thing altogether to feel that days not appointed or sanctioned by God can be observed in honor to him. We are not in the same position as those Jews whose consciences were caught in the salvation-historical shift wrought by Christ.

c. What about Jewish converts today? Would their observance of holy days and food laws still be a matter of indifference to God? It may be that more is expected in light of the completed revelation, and I would certainly try to teach them, but maybe they could have the same hyperactive conscience as the Jews of Paul's day. In any event, they must be careful not to bind their weak conscience on other believers, and they must not adopt other elements of the law that are inherently contrary to the gospel.

5. Paul says in vv. 7-9 that the Christian must follow his conscience because he or she lives to please the Lord, not his fellow believers. We are the Lord's from start to finish, and every aspect of our lives, even our death, is lived under his lordship. Christ's lordship is so total that it includes both the dead and the living.

6. In vv. 10-12 he explains that refusing to accept one another because of disputes over matters of indifference to God is absurd in light of the fact we will each answer to God not only for our practices but also for our refusal to receive one another.

## **B. Do not cause your brother to stumble (14:13-23)**

**<sup>13</sup>Let us, therefore, no longer judge one another, but judge this instead: not to place a stumbling block for a brother or a cause for offense. <sup>14</sup>I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, except to the one who considers something to be unclean; to that one, it is unclean. <sup>15</sup>For if your brother is grieved on account of [your] food, you no longer are walking in accordance with love. Do not by your food destroy that one for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup>Therefore, do not let your good be blasphemed. <sup>17</sup>For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup>For the one who in this serves Christ as a slave is pleasing to God and approved by people. <sup>19</sup>So then, let us pursue the things of peace and the things of edification for one another. <sup>20</sup>Do not for the sake of food demolish the work of God. All things are indeed clean, but it is evil for the person who eats with stumbling [to eat]. <sup>21</sup>It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine or [anything] by which your brother stumbles. <sup>22</sup>The faith which you have, keep to yourself before God. Blessed is the man who does not bring judgment on himself by what he approves, <sup>23</sup>but the man who doubts stands condemned if he eats, because it is not from faith; and everything that is not from faith is sin.**

1. In v. 13 Paul tells the Jewish and Gentile Christians that rather than judge each other, they ought to decide (or judge) not to place before their brother or sister a "stumbling block" or a spiritual trap ("cause of offense"). In other words, we are not to do something that will lead to the spiritual downfall of our brother or sister. It becomes clear in the following verses that Paul is speaking specifically of the differences between Jewish and Gentile Christians regarding the old covenant food laws.

2. Verse 14 is somewhat parenthetical in that it gives the basis on which one's behavior can be a stumbling block and an obstacle, can lead to another's spiritual harm. The fact of the matter is that no food in "unclean," meaning ritually defiled as defined by the Mosaic law. Those aspects of the law have no continuing validity. Indeed, the Lord himself taught this, as Mark points out in Mk. 7:19b. *But that is not the end of the story.*

3. The Jewish Christians, whom Paul labels weak in faith, have not been able to fully internalize this truth. Their consciences have been so firmly trained regarding the Mosaic food laws that many of them cannot escape the sense it is wrong to eat meat or drink wine that may be ritually unclean. Because of that personal conviction, they would be sinning if they consumed this kind of food or drink. If you believe God forbids you to do something, your doing it dishonors God because it says you value that thing more than you value pleasing God (see v. 23).

4. In vv. 15-16 Paul explains v. 13b (decide not to place a stumbling block for a brother) in light of v. 14 (violating one's conscience is sinful). He says to the Gentile majority that certain ways of exercising their right to eat meat and drink wine may lead their Jewish brother or sister into sin by pressuring them to act contrary to their (albeit hyperactive) conscience. And that would not be consistent with the cardinal Christian virtue of love.

5. Paul goes further and commands them not to exercise their freedom to eat in such a way that it will "destroy" their weaker Jewish brethren for whom Christ died. They are not to let their good liberty be reviled, which is what would happen if they exercised it without regard for the tender consciences of their brethren.

Cranfield comments (2:714-715):

The *gar* [for] connects the sentence, not with v. 14 . . . but with v. 13b. The weak in faith will be grievously hurt, he will have the integrity of his faith (i.e., faith in its deepest sense of *fides qua*) and obedience destroyed, and his salvation put at risk, if he is led by his strong fellow-Christian's insistence on exercising the liberty, which he (the strong Christian) truly has, into doing something for which he as yet does not possess the inward liberty. The strong will therefore not be acting in accordance with Christian love, if his weak brother is thus seriously hurt on account of the food which he (the strong Christian) eats.

Moo likewise states (pp. 853-854):

Verse 14, supplying the theoretical basis for Paul's use of the language of spiritual downfall in v. 13, is somewhat parenthetical. Verse 15, accordingly, probably relates back especially to v. 13: Don't put a stumbling block in the way of a brother (v. 13b), . . . "for" this is just what you are doing – by insisting on exercising your freedom to eat food, you bring pain to your fellow believer and thereby violate the cardinal Christian virtue of love. The "pain" that the "strong" believer causes the "weak" believer is more than the annoyance or irritation that the "weak" believer might feel toward those who act in ways they do not approve. Its relationship to the warnings about spiritual downfall in vv. 13b and 15b show that it must denote the pain caused the "weak" believer by the violation of his or her conscience.

6. He explains in vv. 17-18 that the kingdom of God in which we participate is not essentially a matter of eating and drinking but a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy that are produced by the Holy Spirit. Here I think Paul is referring to moral living, support of and harmony with fellow Christians, and joy in the life and fellowship with which God has blessed us. The one who serves Christ with these priorities on straight is pleasing to God and, rather than being blasphemed by the weak, is esteemed by them.

7. In v. 19 he exhorts them to pursue peace and mutual edification. As Cranfield explains (2:721), "What is required is an altogether earnest seeking to promote among brethren such a true peace (based on the fundamental peace with God which God Himself has established in Christ) as must manifest itself in mutual upbuilding." This applies to all, but the strong especially needed to hear it because of their insensitive treatment of the weak.

8. In vv. 20-22a Paul rephrases the same points he made in vv. 13-15. The believer should not eat meat, drink wine, or do anything else when to do so will harm his brother or sister by

pushing them to act ahead of their conscience. The strong should not exercise their convictions in their weak brothers' faces, thereby placing a stumbling block in their path, but should abstain in those situations. That is what it means in v. 22 to keep the convictions (faith) you have to yourself before God. Since Paul clearly stated that all food is clean, he obviously is not forbidding all teaching of the weak. He is, however, restricting the strong's exercise of liberty until the weak among them genuinely have been enlightened.

9. In v. 22b-23 Paul says blessed is the strong believer whose conscience does not condemn him when he exercises his liberty, but the weak believer who eats with doubts about its propriety is sinning and is therefore under God's condemnation.

### C. The example of Christ (15:1-6)

**Now we, the strong, ought to bear the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Let each of us please [his] neighbor in what is good for the purpose of edification. <sup>3</sup>For even the Christ did not please himself, but just as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you fell on me." <sup>4</sup>For as much as was written beforehand was written for our instruction, in order that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might hold hope securely. <sup>5</sup>And may the God of endurance and encouragement give you a like mind among yourselves in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that unanimously with one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. Rather than the strong pleasing themselves by insisting on the unfettered exercise of their liberty, they ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, meaning they ought to ease the burden of the weak by accepting them and doing what love requires toward them.

2. Each of the strong should please his weak "neighbor" (fellow believer) for the neighbor's spiritual benefit, which results in the growth and solidarity (edification) of the community of faith. For even the Christ did not please himself but went to the cross where he bore for others the ultimate insults against God. As Cranfield remarks on v. 3:

The purpose of the quotation [of Ps. 69:9] is to indicate the lengths to which Christ went in His not pleasing Himself. If He, for men's sakes, was willing to bear, as one element of his sufferings, the concentration of all men's hatred of God, of all their futile, inanely contemptuous, insolence against God, how absurdly ungrateful should we be, if we could not bring ourselves to renounce our self-gratification in so unimportant a matter as the exercising of our freedom with regard to what we eat or whether we observe special days – for the sake of our brothers for whom He suffered so much!

3. Having quoted Ps. 69:9, Paul in v. 4 reminds them that the Scriptures were written for their instruction, so that with endurance and by means of the encouragement provided by the Scriptures, they might remain steadfast in their hope. Though written in the past, it is God's word for us today.

4. Verses 5-6 contain a prayer of intercession that Paul offers to God and records for the benefit of the Roman Christians. It serves as an indirect way of exhorting them. His prayer is that they may have a "like mind" among themselves, meaning that, despite their differences over food laws and holy days, they might remain united in their devotion to the Lord and to serving him in the world. Only when such unity exists are we able to glorify God in the way he deserves to be glorified. Division over matters of indifference diverts the church from its purpose.

#### D. Final appeal (15:7-13)

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore, welcome one another, just as also Christ welcomed you for the glory of God. <sup>8</sup>For I say Christ has become a servant of the circumcision for the sake of God's truth, in order to confirm the promises to the fathers, <sup>9</sup>and the Gentiles glorify God for [his] mercy, just as it is written, "On account of this I will acknowledge you among the Gentiles and sing praise to your name." <sup>10</sup>And again it says, "Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people." <sup>11</sup>And again, "Praise the Lord, all the Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him." <sup>12</sup>And again Isaiah says, "He will be the shoot of Jesse, the one who arises to rule the Gentiles; on him the Gentiles will hope." <sup>13</sup>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

1. In v. 7 Paul urges the saints to accept one another as fellow members of a family because they have been received by Christ and therefore *are* fellow members of a family, the family of God. This kind of acceptance and unity redounds to the glory of God.

2. In vv. 8-12 he says they also are to receive one another because Christ has acted to bring God's blessings to both Jews and Gentiles in fulfillment of Scripture.

a. Christ became a servant of the Jew (e.g., Mat. 15:24 – he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel) in order to show that God is faithful, which he did by fulfilling the promise of blessing that God had made to the Jewish patriarchs.

b. He also became a servant of the Jew in order that the Gentile might glorify God for the sake of his mercy through their subsequently being grafted into the people of Israel.

c. In vv. 9b-12 Paul quotes various Scriptures to show that the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the praise of God has always been part of God's purpose.



3. In v. 13 Paul rounds off his exhortation to the weak and strong with another prayer report. He prays that, despite their differences, they will be filled with joy and peace in their believing, because it is only in this kind of community that the hope produced by the Spirit abounds. The more joy and unity there is in our fellowship, the more the Spirit generates a genuine expectation of eternal glory. Moo (p. 833) summarizes 15:7-13 this way: "Both 'strong' and 'weak' Christians should receive each other as full and respected members of the Christian community, for God himself has shown, in fulfillment of Scripture, that he accepts both Jews and Gentiles as his people."

### *Some Application Issues*

1. Romans 14:1-15:13 makes clear that it is God's will for a Christian to abstain from optional conduct when engaging in it may encourage a Christian who believes the conduct is sinful to engage in it contrary to his conscience. It would be unloving to exercise one's liberty in such a brother's presence because that would put undue pressure on him to act ahead of his conscience, to engage in that conduct before he was convinced internally that it was really acceptable to do so, which would be sinful. Pushing a brother to sin by violating his conscience is a grave wrong because it not only is deeply distressing but can begin a hardening process that leads to spiritual ruin.

2. Paul says the same thing in relation to the consciences of certain Gentiles 1 Cor. 8:7-13. He says there that even if the arguments of some in the congregation that it was acceptable to eat cultic meals in pagan temples were correct, which they were not (as he makes clear in 10:14-22), the principle of brotherly love still would require that they forego the practice so as not to push their brothers who were former idolaters into violating their "weak" consciences (there meaning idol-sensitive consciences) by participating in the meal.

3. In a culture that glorifies freedom and majority rule, Paul's teaching on this subject meets much resistance.

a. Those with wider consciences often cannot bear restricting their freedom for the sake of those they believe are in error, especially when those thought to be in error are a minority. There is this sense that liberty is negated by any condition on its exercise and that practices of the majority should not be circumscribed by a minority. Unfortunately, that sense sometimes trumps the biblical injunction to love, and Paul's admonitions are rationalized away in the process.

b. We fear the truth that we are to restrict our liberty out of love for Christians with narrower consciences because we fear it will lead inevitably to a church that is captive in everything to the narrowest conscience in the group. Even if that were the case, which I am convinced it is not, it is no justification for avoiding what Paul taught. Paul delivered the word of the Lord not only to the Romans and Corinthians but also to us.

4. I grant that wisdom is required, sometimes great wisdom, in moving from Paul's reasoning and instruction regarding the situations in Rome and Corinth to the kinds of cases that most often concern us today. *But let's first allow Paul's teaching to sink in and have its effect on our hearts.* Then we can wrestle with some of the stickier questions in moving from first-century Rome and Corinth to the church today.

5. I do not have all the answers, but in applying Paul's teaching I think it helps to keep a number of things in mind. Don't stone me for these, okay? I just offer them for your consideration, as I think they can be helpful.

a. First, as I noted last week, Paul is speaking about matters of *conscience*, not matters of *preference*.

(1) For Paul's teaching to apply, the conduct in question must be something the other person feels is *sinful*, wrong for him to do. It does not apply to disagreements over matters of preference no matter how strong those preferences may be.

(2) You may prefer topical preaching over expository preaching; discussion Bible classes over lecture classes; taking the Lord's Supper before the sermon over taking it after; one kind of worship song over another kind of song; more worship songs over fewer worship songs, and on and on. You may have good reasons for your preferences, but however good they are the situation is outside the scope of Paul's teaching. He is dealing with what is believed, at least at some level, to be sinful.

(3) I think it is appropriate and necessary for elders to explore alleged matters of conscience to satisfy themselves that it is not merely a matter of preference that is mistakenly being forced into the conscience category. Here they simply are looking to see if the brother has *any kind of basis* for believing the issue is a matter of God's will not whether they agree with the brother's understanding.

b. Second, Paul is speaking about conduct that is done *in the presence of* the brother or sister with the narrower conscience.

(1) That is why in Rom. 14:22a he tells those with a broader conscience to keep the convictions they have to themselves before God and why in 1 Cor. 8:10 he speaks of the one who *sees* them eating in the temple. They are free to enjoy the liberty they have in Christ when they are away from brothers with a narrower conscience. Indeed, Paul in 14:22b labels as "blessed" the man who can enjoy his liberty with a clear conscience.

(2) The restriction is limited to being in the other's presence presumably because doing something in someone's presence increases the pressure on that person to engage in it before he or she is truly ready. So if, for example, one's brother cannot play cards with a clear

conscience, one is free to play cards outside of the brother's presence but not to invite him over and play cards in his face.

c. Third, Paul is speaking here and in 1 Corinthians of conduct that *can be imitated* by the brother with a narrower conscience, which is a qualification that is not always recognized.

(1) When conduct that a brother with a narrower conscience can imitate (like eating meat, drinking wine, eating cultic meals in pagan temples) is done in that brother's presence the social dynamic creates unacceptable pressure on him to engage in the conduct, to copy it, before he is fully convinced it is acceptable to do so. Paul says that love will not subject a brother to *that risk* of sinning, will not risk pushing him *in this way* to act contrary to his conscience. Teaching him that his belief is incorrect also pressures him to engage in the practice, but that is acceptable because it is a different kind of pressure than modeling the behavior in his presence.

(2) But some disagreements about sin are over things that are not matters of personal conduct, not behavior that a brother can be induced to imitate.

(a) A person may believe, for example, that it is sinful for a church building to have a kitchen. He has no problem with kitchens per se. He thinks it is fine for individual Christians to have kitchens; in fact, he has one in his home. He just thinks it is wrong for there to be one in the *church* building.

(b) Now, this brother is free to make his case to the elders about the sinfulness of church kitchens, and if he succeeds in convincing them then they are obligated as servants of Christ to remove (or not include) the kitchen. But the question is whether, *having failed to convince them* that church kitchens are sinful, the brother can fairly appeal to Paul's teaching to claim that the elders *still* are biblically obligated to refrain from having a kitchen in the building to protect his narrower conscience.

(c) I see that situation as being outside the scope of Paul's teaching in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8. I think that because the brother believes it is sinful only for a *church* to have a kitchen, but he as an individual cannot act as a church, as a congregation, and thus he cannot be pressured to emulate the practice of a *church* having a kitchen.

(d) Let me give you another example that might make this distinction clearer. If the elders decided to incorporate the church and you thought it was sinful to do so but were unable to convince them you were correct, you may need to leave the congregation rather than give tacit approval to its "sin" by remaining a member. But the act of incorporating the congregation is not something you can be pressured to imitate because you are not an eldership or a congregation. Yes, you are involved in the action through your tacit approval if you remain a member, but you are not pressured to violate your conscience by imitating the action. The pressure you feel from the elders' disagreement with you is more akin to someone teaching something that contradicts your convictions, which we see Paul has no objection to doing.

d. Fourth, Paul's instruction was that the Gentile Christians abstain from engaging in certain optional conduct – eating and drinking in the presence of a brother with a narrower conscience – not that they forego less burdensome ways of obeying a divine command.

(1) Abstaining from the purely optional conduct of eating and drinking has no counterbalancing negative spiritual consequences. It involves only giving up self-gratification, the enjoyment of meat and wine, for the blessing of brothers and sisters. The situation can be different, however, when a brother's narrower conscience relates to the way in which a command is to be obeyed. In that case, deferring to the narrower brother can make obeying the command so burdensome as to become a roadblock to obedience. There is now a negative spiritual consequence that must be taken into account, which was not present in the situations addressed by Paul.

(2) Imagine that someone in the congregation comes to the conviction that it is sinful to participate in the Lord's Supper when multiple cups are used for the fruit of the vine; he thinks the juice must be drunk by all from the same container. If he fails to convince the elders that using multiple cups is sinful, the question is whether Paul's teaching mandates that the elders shift to one cup out of love so as not to pressure this brother to violate his conscience. I am not convinced Paul's teaching requires that.

(3) Unlike deferring to the narrower brother in the matter of eating meat, deferring to the narrower brother in the matter of communion cups creates for others a significant obstacle to obeying the command to take the Lord's Supper. Some people simply cannot overcome the sense of disgust and concern over disease in drinking after hundreds of people. Granted that their gut-level aversion to doing so is not a matter of conscience – they do not believe it is sinful to use one cup – but it is a reality that seriously burdens their obedience. So in this case, the effect of the brother's narrow conscience, because of this aversion to drinking from one cup, is to pressure the other brothers and sisters not to share in the Supper, which *is* a matter of conscience.

(4) I do not believe Paul's teaching requires the elders in such a case to close their eyes to this reality and pretend that people will not be pressured by the use of one cup to violate their consciences about sharing in the Supper. As I said, in the cases Paul addressed there was no countervailing spiritual cost; the Gentiles were instructed to abstain from purely optional conduct not to abstain from all but the most burdensome way of obeying a command.

(5) Note that the pressure that is put on those with an aversion to using one cup to violate their consciences in the matter of the Lord's Supper is not pressure to imitate what is done in their faces (the practice of using one cup), so Paul's teaching in Romans and 1 Corinthians cannot be appealed to as a protection of their consciences. But they are not claiming Paul's teaching in those texts as protection. Rather, they are claiming that putting a substantial burden on others' observance of the Supper (the countervailing spiritual cost) removes the one-cuppers from the scope of Paul's teaching, and thus the elders are not biblically obligated to defer to the their narrower conscience in the matter.

6. So has Paul's instruction died a death of a thousand qualifications? Is there nothing left that applies today?

a. His teaching can apply in various situations, but the one that is perhaps most relevant today, at least in my judgment, is the case of instrumental music in worship. Many people, myself included, are convinced that it is sinful to worship God with instrumental accompaniment. I have explained why I think that in a paper on my website (theoutlet.us) titled "Music in Christian Worship." That does not mean that I believe those who disagree with me on the matter are for that reason bound for hell. I trust the grace of our Lord will cover this error, whichever of us turns out to be wrong. But the fact I do not judge it to be a "salvation issue" does not mean it is a trivial thing; no aspect of God's will is trivial.

b. What we see happening in our brotherhood are elders switching their congregations to instrumental worship. These men insist on engaging in the purely optional conduct of worshipping God with instruments in the assembly of the saints, in the presence of their brothers and sisters, who at the very least are not fully satisfied that doing so is acceptable to God. These Christians with the narrower conscience are being greatly pressured to sin by running ahead of their consciences in the matter, but as far as I can tell, few people care. Paul's teaching on this point is a threat to an agenda, and it gets swept under the rug.

7. Before moving on, I should mention what I see as a more general qualification of Paul's teaching. I think there is a difference in what love owes a congregational member whose conscience is put at risk by a *change in practice* and what it owes one who *joins* the congregation knowing that the existing practices are unacceptable to his conscience. Love will not impose a conscience-pressuring or conscience-violating practice on another, but one who joins a congregation knowing that the existing practices are unacceptable to his conscience is *voluntarily exposing oneself* to the practice for the purpose of changing it, for the purpose of setting the others straight. So one who, for example, joins an instrumental congregation believing instrumental worship is wrong is in a different position from one who is a member of an *a cappella* congregation that goes instrumental.

8. Finally, let me just add a footnote about Paul's use of the term "weak" in Romans 14, then it is on to the letter closing that begins in 15:14. Those who believe it is wrong to worship God with instrumental music, for example, are *similar* to the "weak ones" in Rome in that the convictions of both are relatively restrictive. That is why both need those with broader consciences to limit their liberty. They are *dissimilar*, however, in that only the "weak ones" in Rome were *for certain* misguided. There is a longstanding, unresolved dispute about the propriety of instrumental music in worship. So to the extent the label "weak ones" connotes that one's view is erroneous in addition to being relatively narrow, applying it to those opposed to instrumental music and other worship innovations is misleading and I think needlessly alienating.

## VII. The Letter Closing (15:14 - 16:27)

### A. Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)

#### 1. God's chosen minister to the Gentiles (15:14-21)

**<sup>14</sup>Now my brothers, I am convinced about you, I myself, that you yourselves are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. <sup>15</sup>But I have written to you rather boldly in part, as one who reminds you, because of the grace that was given to me from God <sup>16</sup>that I might be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving the gospel of God as a priest, in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, I have [this] boasting in Christ Jesus with reference to what concerns God. <sup>18</sup>For I will not dare to say anything except what Christ accomplished through me for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, <sup>19</sup>by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit [of God], so that from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum I have completed [the preaching of] the gospel of Christ, <sup>20</sup>but in this way, by striving eagerly to preach the gospel where Christ was not named, so that I not build on another's foundation. <sup>21</sup>Rather, just as it is written, "Those to whom it was not announced concerning him shall see, and those who have not heard will understand."**

a. In vv. 14-16 Paul assures these Christians in Rome, whom he has never visited, that he did not intend by his letter to call into question their spiritual maturity. Rather, he wrote them as he did because God has made him a minister of Christ to the Gentiles. He serves the gospel as a (metaphorical) priest whose role is to present the Gentiles to God as an acceptable offering, meaning as people who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

b. He says in v. 17 that, because he has been called by God in this way ("Therefore"), he can legitimately boast in Christ about that ministry. It is not a boasting about his own achievements but a boasting in what Christ has accomplished through him.

c. In vv. 18-19a he says that the success of his ministry is due to divine enablement. Christ is the active worker; Paul is simply the instrument. Gentiles were brought to obedience by both "word and deed," which includes miracles (signs and wonders), and all of which was accomplished through the power of the Spirit.

d. The result of this divinely driven ministry was that, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (a coastal province northwest of Macedonia, right across the Adriatic Sea from Italy), Paul had planted strategic churches in all these regions (v. 19b). As Knox puts it, "[the message had

been] 'proclaimed' widely enough and [the church had been] 'planted' firmly enough to assure that the name of Christ would soon be heard throughout its borders."

e. Paul explains in v. 20 that the manner in which this was done was by striving eagerly to preach the gospel where there was no worship of Christ at all. In other words, Paul saw his particular mission as planting strategic churches in virgin gospel territory. Of course, in fulfilling this pioneer-church planting ministry, Paul often engaged in other ministry activities and worked with churches that he did not plant (e.g. Antioch).

f. Paul in v. 21 cites Isa. 52:15b for the point that his church-planting ministry among Gentiles is fulfilling the O.T. prediction about Gentiles coming to see and understand the message about the Servant of the Lord.

## 2. Plans to visit Rome (15:22-29)

**<sup>22</sup>For this reason, I was also frequently hindered from coming to you. <sup>23</sup>But now, no longer having a place in these regions and having had a longing to come to you for enough years, [I plan to] <sup>24</sup>when I go to Spain, for I hope to see you when passing through and by you to be helped on my way there, if first I may for a time be filled full of you. <sup>25</sup>But now, I am going to Jerusalem to render a service to the saints. <sup>26</sup>For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to do some sharing for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup>For they were pleased, and they are their debtors; for if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual things, they are also obligated to minister to them in fleshly things. <sup>28</sup>Therefore, after completing this and having sealed this fruit to them, I will go by way of you to Spain. <sup>29</sup>And I know that when coming to you, I will come in the fullness of Christ's blessing.**

a. Paul explains in vv. 22-24 that the demands of his ministry in planting churches from Jerusalem to Illyricum had often prevented him from coming to Rome. But having planted churches in those regions, he hopes to visit Rome on his way to planting the church in Spain.

b. He says in vv. 25-27 that first he is going to Jerusalem to deliver the collection taken from the Gentile mission churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem (v. 25). Those Gentiles were not *legally* obligated to send this money, as in the case of the Jewish temple tax, but they were indebted to the Jewish Christians as the people through whom they received the blessings of Christ. The salvation of the Gentiles comes only by way of the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel (1:16, 4:13-16, 11:17-24, 15:7-9).

c. In vv. 28-29 he says that after delivering the collection and "having sealed this fruit to them," he plans to head to Spain by way of Rome. "Sealing" is often an official

affirmation of authenticity, so "sealing" the collection (fruit) perhaps refers to Paul's vouching for the contents, both in terms of amount and purpose. With that mission accomplished, Paul knows that his visit to Rome will be with the full blessings of Christ. In other words, he would not have gone prematurely.

d. We do not know if Paul ever got to Spain. The N.T. never reports such a visit; and the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles suggests that Paul turned back to the east after his trip to Rome. But part of 1 Clement, a letter from Clement of Rome to the Corinthians dating around A.D. 95, can be interpreted to suggest that he did reach Spain.

### **3. Request for prayer (15:30-33)**

**<sup>30</sup>Now I urge you, [brothers], through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to struggle with me in prayers to God on my behalf, <sup>31</sup>so that I may be rescued from the disobedient in Judea and my service to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, <sup>32</sup>so that coming to you in joy through the will of God, I might find rest with you. <sup>33</sup>May the God of peace be with you all, amen.**

a. Paul in vv. 30-31 urges the Christians in Rome to struggle with him in prayers on his behalf that he might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. And as we know from Acts 21:27-36, the Romans took him in custody to keep the Jews from killing him.

b. Paul also wants them to pray that the collection will be accepted by the church in Jerusalem. This collection and its reception were loaded with theological overtones. The contribution showed the Gentiles' appreciation of Jewish primacy in the gospel, and the acceptance showed the Jews' acceptance of these churches in the one community of faith. There were conservative Jewish-Christian groups that continued to be hostile toward Paul, and he was concerned that the gift might be rebuffed.

c. If this happens, he might come to them in joy, if it is God's will that he come, and be refreshed by them (v. 32). Verse 33 expresses Paul's desire for God's blessing on their community.

## **B. Greetings (16:1-23)**

### **1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)**

**Now I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is [also] a servant of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup>that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the**



**saints and may assist her in whatever matter she has need of you, for she herself has also been a benefactor of many, myself included.**

a. Paul commends to the Roman Christians a sister in Christ named Phoebe. She may well have been the person who carried Paul's letter to the Romans. She is described as a "*diakonos*" of the church in Cenchrea, which has fueled debate about whether the early church had women "deacons" in the sense of servants who were formally appointed by the church.

(1) The word means "servant" and is used in that general sense many times in the N.T. So one must look beyond the word itself to determine whether Paul uses it here as a description or as a title.

(2) Historically, apart from an equally ambiguous reference in Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan (about A.D. 110), there is no mention of female deacons until the third century. That, coupled with the emphasis on male leadership in the church and what I consider the most likely interpretation of 1 Tim. 3:11 ("wives" of deacons), leads me to favor the general term "servant."

b. But granting that Phoebe was not a "deacon" in the formal appointed sense, this woman was obviously an important member of the church in Cenchrea and highly esteemed by Paul.

(1) He asks the Romans to receive her in a manner worthy of the Lord and to help her in whatever way she needs help.

(2) Paul describes her as a "benefactor" or "patron" of many, including himself. According to Moo:

A "patron" was one who came to the aid of others, especially foreigners, by providing housing and financial aid and by representing their interests before local authorities. Cenchreae's status as a busy seaport would make it imperative that a Christian in its church take up this ministry on behalf of visiting Christians. Phoebe, then, was probably a woman of high social standing and some wealth, who put her status, resources, and time at the services of traveling Christians, like Paul, who needed help and support. Paul now urges the Romans to reciprocate.

## **2. Greetings to Roman Christians (16:3-16)**

**<sup>3</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup>who risked their own neck on behalf of my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles, <sup>5</sup>and [greet] the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epenetus, who is the firstfruits of Asia for Christ. <sup>6</sup>Greet Mary, who**

labored much for you. <sup>7</sup>Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup>Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. <sup>10</sup>Greet Apelles, one approved in Christ. Greet those from the [household] of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup>Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those from the [household] of Narcissus who are in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis who labored much in the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Greet Rufus, the elect in the Lord, and the mother of him and of me. <sup>14</sup>Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them. <sup>15</sup>Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. <sup>16</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

a. There was a tendency in the ancient world to give certain names to certain kinds of people. Moo says these studies show that a majority of the names are Gentile and that the majority of the names are those of slaves and "freedmen," or the descendants of slaves/freedmen.

b. Paul refers to at least three house churches (vv. 5, 14, 15) in this greeting.

As Moo notes:

Early Christians did not have large public facilities for meeting, so they used their own houses. And since even the largest house of the wealthiest Christian would hold no more than seventy or eighty for worship, growth beyond that point required that the Christians split up into house churches.

c. Verse 16:7 has received much attention in recent discussions about women's role in the church.

(1) The second name in 16:7 is probably the feminine name "Junia," in which case Andronicus and Junia are probably husband and wife. It is possible, however, that the second name is the masculine name "Junias" (a contracted form of Junianus) instead of the feminine name "Junia" ("Junias" in ERV, ASV, RSV, NAS, NIV[<sup>84</sup>]). In that case, they are two Jewish brothers in Christ.

(2) It also is unclear whether Paul means that Andronicus and Junia(s) were themselves *apostles* who were noteworthy or that they were well known *to* the apostles. Several recent translations (NET, ESV, CSB) reflect the latter.

(3) If Andronicus and Junia(s) are in fact referred to as "apostles," it would be in a nontechnical sense that they were traveling missionaries. The word "apostle" is used elsewhere in the N.T. in a nontechnical way (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), and it is used of traveling missionaries in the Apostolic Fathers (Did. 11.3-6; Herm. *Vis.* 13.1; *Sim.* 92.4; 93.5; 102.2). Schreiner remarks (p. 797), "One should scarcely conclude from the reference to Junia and the other

women coworkers names here that women exercised authority over men contrary to the Pauline admonitions in 1 Tim. 2:12."

d. It is noteworthy that Paul mentions nine women in this list, five of whom are commended for their labor in the Lord. Though women cannot assume the same roles as men in the church, they were active and important members in the community of faith.

e. I do not understand the command in v. 16 that they "Greet one another with a holy kiss" as a command to kiss. As Moo says, "[t]he kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world generally and in Judaism especially." Paul *assumes* they'll greet by kissing but commands that it be a "*holy* kiss." He is saying, "The kiss with which you greet one another is to be holy," meaning a kiss that is a genuine expression of Christian love. The greeting is not to be duplicitous, as was the kiss that betrayed our Lord. If a commander wrote to his troops: "Greet President Obama with a respectful salute," his point would not be that they are to salute – that is a given – but that *when* they salute they do so with the respect that is due the office of President.

### 3. A warning, a promise, and a prayer (16:17-20)

**<sup>17</sup>Now I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who create dissensions and causes for offense contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. <sup>18</sup>For such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own belly, and through smooth speech and well chosen words deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. <sup>19</sup>For [the report of] your obedience has reached all people. Therefore, I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise toward the good and innocent toward the evil. <sup>20</sup>And the God of peace will swiftly crush the Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.**

a. In vv. 17-18 Paul warns them to watch out for those who create division in the church and threaten the spiritual lives of the members by teaching what is contrary to what they had been taught. He seems to have a certain group in mind, perhaps the Judaizers who plagued him throughout his ministry. They are to avoid or turn away from these false teachers because they are not serving the Lord and because they are able to deceive the unsuspecting by their smooth talk.

b. He notes in v.19 that the existence of the church in Rome was well known, and with that kind of profile it is only a matter of time before the wolves arrive ("For"). Paul, of course, rejoices over them, but he wants them to be "innocent" in terms of evil but "wise," meaning not naive, in terms of false teaching. As Bruce puts it, they should not be "so 'simple-minded' that as to swallow whatever is offered." It's the idea behind Jesus' saying about being "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mat. 10:16).

c. As they practice that discernment, God will give them swift victory over the Satan-inspired heretics who arrive to trouble them (v. 20a). And Paul adds a prayer for the grace of the Lord Jesus to be with them.

#### **4. Greetings from Paul's companions (16:21-24)**

**<sup>21</sup>Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, and [so do] Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. <sup>22</sup>I, Tertius, who wrote the epistle, greet you in the Lord. <sup>23</sup>Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and [so does] Quartus, the brother.**

a. Paul's companions here include their greetings to the Roman brothers and sisters. Jason is probably the person from Thessalonica mentioned in Acts 17:5-7, 9, and Sosipater is probably the Berean named Sopater in Acts 20:4.

b. Tertius is the secretary who actually wrote the letter under Paul's direction. Gaius is probably the same person mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:14 as one Paul baptized. Erastus is described here as the city's "treasurer," and this is probably the same Erastus mentioned in an inscription from Corinth. Nothing else is known of Quartus.

#### **5. Concluding doxology (16:25-27)**

**<sup>25</sup>Now to him who is able to establish you, in accordance with my gospel, that is, the preaching of Jesus Christ, in accordance with the revelation of the mystery; having been kept silent through times eternal <sup>26</sup>but now having been displayed and through the prophetic scriptures, in accordance with the command of the eternal God, having been made known for [bringing about] the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles; <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to him be glory forever, amen.**

Paul ends the letter with a doxology in praise of the God who has in the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed the climax of salvation history. Schreiner comments (p. 810):

Paul prays that God will receive the glory for the gospel that has now been revealed. This gospel was both hidden and prophesied in the OT, but the age of fulfillment has come so that the mystery that was shrouded in the past and prophesied is now publicly declared and being fulfilled. The gospel centers on Jesus the Messiah, for he fulfills the saving promises of the OT, and these promises are being realized in the inclusion of all nations into the people of God. As the Gentiles exercise the obedience that comes from faith, they show that they are the children of Abraham.

God's saving plan, which includes Jews and Gentiles and is effected through Jesus the Messiah, is wisely constructed so that he receives that glory and praise forever.