Paul's Letter to the Romans

by

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Samuel Coleridge once stated that the Book of Romans was "the most profound work in existence."[1] Many would agree with him,[2] and for some, like Martin Luther, it became the most important book in the New Testament. Certainly it expresses the quintessence of Pauline theology. Unlike some of Paul's other letters, there has never been any serious challenge to the letter's authenticity. To be sure, a fair amount of discussion has attended chapter 16, since chapter 15 might seem to be a conclusion with its "amen," but this issue notwithstanding, nearly all scholars and interpreters of all persuasions concur that this letter comes from the hand of Paul. Even chapter 16, though its authenticity occasionally has been questioned, usually is given the benefit of the doubt. The case for its authenticity is, to use Brown's words, "overwhelmingly strong".[3] Hence, the attendant discussion frequently is more along the lines of textual displacement theories than the possibility of some secondary hand.[4]

In general, the letter falls into five rather easily demarcated sections, and they are as follows:

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[1] S. Coleridge, *Table Talk* (Oxford: Oxford University, n.d.), p. 232 as quoted in A. Hunter, *Introducing the New Tesament*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 94.

[2] John Knox, for instance, stated that the Epistle to the Romans was the most important theological work ever written, *Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), IX. 355.

[3] R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 575.

[4] Displacement theories general follow the fact that in p46 (the earliest copy of Romans to date), the doxology that in English translations appears at the end of chapter 16 (Ro. 16:25-27) here appears at the end of chapter 15. To complicate matters, the same doxology is also found after chapter 14 in other early copies of the letter (e.g., Old Latin) and after *both* chapters 14 and 16 in still others (e.g., Codex A). In all, there is textual evidence for no less than six locations for this doxology, cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 534. T. W. Manson suggested that Romans was a circular letter, that chapter 16 was added to a version sent to Ephesus, and that the version of only chapters 1-15 was sent to Rome. An even shorter version, chapters 1-14, was sent to other Pauline churches, cf. T. Manson, "St. Paul's Letter to the Romans—and Others," *BJRL* 31 (1948) pp. 224-240. Harry Gamble, Jr., on the other hand, suggests that the full 16 chapters as they are usually translated constitutes the original, and that any dislocations came later, cf. H. Gamble, Jr., *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977). There is no consensus on how the dislocations occurred, but there is general agreement that all parts are from Paul.

1. Paul's opening address to his readers (1:1-16)
2. Paul's gospel (1:17-8:39)
3. God's purpose in salvation-history (9-11)
4. Christian ethics (12:1-15:13)
5. Paul's future plans and greetings to the church (15:14-16:27)

Unlike many of his other letters, Paul does not seem to be writing to address a theological crisis. Instead, though he did not establish the Roman church nor had he personally visited the Christians there (cf. Ro. 1:10-13; cf. 15:22-23), he does hope to encourage their faith (Ro. 1:12), but especially, to solicit their help in a mission further to the west (Ro. 15:24).

The Establishment of the Roman Church

The establishment of the Roman church is nowhere described in the New Testament. As such, the best that can be done is to assess the various passing references from which the origins of the church can be inferred. In the first place, there was a sizeable Jewish population in Rome, and while it was an exaggeration, Josephus' comment that there were Jews in every inhabitable community of the whole earth was certainly true of Rome.[5] Philo stated that most Jews in Rome were liberated captives, not Roman citizens,[6] and there are references to Jews in Rome as early as 139 BC.[7] After Pompey's conquest of Palestine, more Jews came to Rome so that by the 1st century, some 40,000 to 50,000 Jews made their home there.[8] At least two Caesars expelled Jews from Rome, Tiberius in AD 19 and Claudius in AD 49, but presumably these were expulsions of Jews who were not Roman citizens, since citizens could not be expelled without a trial.[9] The general assumption, then, is that Christianity first was carried to Rome by Jewish Christians who came to the Jewish community in Rome, just as happened in Antioch and Cyprus (cf. Ac. 11:19).

Working backwards, the Roman historian Tacitus described Nero as using the Christians as scapegoats for the great fire in Rome in AD 64.[10] A few years earlier, we know that when Paul came to Rome as a prisoner under house arrest (*ca.* AD 60-62), a community of Roman Christians already existed (Ac. 28:14b-16). Further, Paul

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[5] *Wars of the Jews*, 2.16.4.

[6] *De legatione ad Gaium* 23 #155.

[7] R. Brown and J. Meier, *Antioch & Rome* (New York: Paulist, 1983), p. 93.

[8] Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 28 #66-67.

[9] Brown and Meier, p. 94, footnote #194.

[10] *Annals* 15:44.

addressed leaders of the Jewish community when he arrived, and some of them were convinced of the Christian message (Ac. 28:17ff.). Even earlier, Paul's Roman letter in about AD 58 assumes a strong Christian presence, and in fact, one that had been there for some time, since he frankly concedes that he had wanted to visit them "for many years" (Ro. 15:23). Further, Paul states that the faith of the Roman Christians was being "reported all over the world" (Ro. 1:8). This seems to suggest that there was a Christian community in Rome no later than the early 50s AD. Further, Paul's encounter with a Christian Jewish couple who had exited Rome under Claudius may push the date back further still to about AD 49 (cf. Ac. 18:1-3). Suetonius describes this expulsion as resulting from the disturbances among the Jews caused by one Chrestus, and most scholars agree that Chrestus is probably a misspelling of Christus, that is, Christ.[11] Hence, Christianity reached Rome by at least the late 40s and perhaps as early as the early 40s AD.

Who brought the gospel to Rome is an open question, the tradition notwithstanding in the Roman Catholic Church that Peter founded the church after he left Jerusalem "for another place" (Ac. 12:17). The esteemed Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown puts it bluntly: *Certainly he [Peter] was not the original missionary who brought Christianity to Rome… There is no serious proof that he was the bishop of the Roman Church… Most likely he did not spend any major time at Rome before 58 when Paul wrote to the Romans…*[12] By the time Paul writes in the late 50s, the internal evidence of his letter suggests that both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians made up the community. Jewish Christians who were non-citizens probably returned to Rome after Claudius' death in AD 54, and perhaps in the intervening period, Gentiles had become Christians also (or moved there from Pauline churches farther east).[13] In any case, it is highly likely that the community of Christians was mixed.[14]

When, Why and How Paul Wrote this Letter

The date of the composition must lie within Paul's final stay at Corinth. In the Roman letter, he mentions specifically that the collection for Jerusalem's distressed Christians was complete (Ro. 15:25-26). Therefore, the composition of Romans must be later than the composition of the Corinthian letters (cf. 1 Co. 16:1-3; 2 Co. 8-9). Paul now was ready to leave for Jerusalem with the delegates and funds. Since Paul

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[11] *Lives of the Caesars* 5.25.4. See discussion in M. Harris, *3 Crucial Questions About Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp.21-24

[12] Brown and Meier, p. 98.

[13] R. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (rpt. London: Duckworth, 1974), pp. 53-54.

[14] See discussion in W. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975). pp. 309-311.

apparently sent the Roman letter by Phoebe, a delegate from Cenchreae, the eastern port of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf (Ro. 16:23), and since he also mentions Gaius (Ro. 16:23), who probably is the same as the Gaius in Corinth (1 Co. 1:14), most interpreters cite Paul's three month stay in Corinth (Ac. 20:2-3) as the likely time when he composed the letter. He may actually have finished the letter in the Cenchreaen port as he was preparing to depart for Jerusalem. If so, then it would have been written in the late 50s, perhaps about AD 57 or 58.

What prompted Paul to write the letter is both simple and complex. It is simple in that Paul directly states that he considered his work in Asia Minor and the Grecian peninsula to be complete (Ro. 15:19). Paul had a long-held desire to preach the gospel further to the west, especially in areas untouched by the Christian message, so he hoped to pass through Rome on his way to Spain (Ro. 15:20-24). Though first he had to complete his trip to Jerusalem with the collection for the poor, immediately afterward he hoped to head westward, visiting Rome on his way, and hopefully receiving some financial assistance in his mission from the Roman church (Ro. 15:25-32). The hope that when he passed through Rome he would "be refreshed" by the Christians there and that they would "assist" him on his journey are tactful suggestions toward financial support for his western mission (Ro. 15:24, 32; cf. 1:13). Of course, he also would be able to offer spiritual benefit to the church in Rome through his ministry (Ro. 1:11-13).

At a deeper level, it has often been conjectured that the Roman letter derived from yet more profound motives. Certainly it would have been unnecessary to write so complete a theological treatise to merely introduce himself. Melanchthon, Luther's understudy, theorized that the letter was a compendium of Christian theology. However, as Kummel has pointed out, this approach leaves unexplained why Paul spends so little time addressing christology, eschatology, the Lord's table, and church order, subjects that from his other letters seem very important to Paul.[15] It is better to view the letter as Paul's introduction to what he considered to be the essence of Christianity as it related to his proposed missionary work in the west. Further, while Paul had never met the Roman Christians, he was acutely aware of certain trends in early Christianity that were incompatible with his understanding of the gospel, such as, the ongoing polemic from his own Jewish compatriots (Ro. 2:17; 3:1-31; 4:1; 7:13; 9:31—10:4; 11:11), the tension between those who were more rigorous in their behavioral standards than others (14:1—15:7), and the accusation that the gospel of grace was inherently antinomian (3:8, 31; 6:1, 15;7:7-14). All of these issues Paul addresses, yet they still are not the main focus of the letter, but rather, corollary subjects. His primary concern is his explanation of the gospel. If he wished the

[15] Kummel, p. 312.

Roman Christians to support his mission, it was only fair to let them know what they would be backing. Earlier in his ministry, he had no need of introductory letters, since he was the founder of the churches to whom he was writing (cf. 2 Co. 3:1-2). In Rome, however, he was unknown, so the Roman epistle introduces both Paul and his gospel in detail. It is this gospel of which he boasts (Ro. 1:16-17).[16] Since the Roman church was a mixed congregation of both Jews and Gentiles, it was especially important for Paul to explain the Gentiles' freedom in Christ while at the same time reminding them of their indebtedness to the heritage of Israel.[17] These, then, seem to be the more complex motives behind the Roman letter.

One more literary feature of the Letter to the Romans should be acknowledged here, that is, the fact that Paul dictated the letter to a secretary, Tertius (Ro. 16:22). How often Paul used an amanuensis is unknown, but in view of the fact that his regular habit was to conclude his letters in his own hand (1 Co. 16:21; Ga. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Th. 3:17), it is usually presumed that he did so often. Still, Tertius is the only amanuensis specifically named in any of Paul's letters. Of course, the use of a secretary raises questions about methods of dictation, the use of shorthand, and the liberty granted to the secretary with regard to the final form of the letter. Secretaries might take down letters verbatim in longhand, they might write in shorthand and then transcribe the final version later, or they might be granted considerably liberty in shaping even the content of the final form of a document. Usually it is assumed that Paul's use of a secretary did not significantly alter the style or thought of Paul's letters.[18]

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[16] L. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 316-317.

[17] R. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 2.191-192.

[18] F. Gingrich, *IDB* (1962) 4.575.

Romans as a Rhetorical Diatribe

Since Paul knew less about the Romans than the recipients of his others letters, the form of the Roman letter seems to reflect his past experience as a teacher more than some specific situation he intended to address. Many scholars have recognized the striking affinities of this letter with the rhetorical diatribe of Greco-Roman intellectuals. Diatribe is a teaching style that frequently pits the thought of the writer against imaginary opponents, hypothetical objections and false conclusions. In Romans, particularly, this style is apparent. Paul bluntly addresses his readers in the second person (Ro. 2:1, 17; 9:19). He sometimes refers to his imaginative opponent as "O man!" or simply "you" (Ro. 2:1, 3-4, 17; 9:20; 11:19). He also refers to his opponents as a group, whom he charges with inconsistency (Ro. 2:3-4, 21-22; 3:1; 9:20-21). He anticipates and responds to his opponents' objections (Ro. 3:1-4, 9; 4:1; 6:1-2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14, 19; 11:1, 19).[19]

Unlike Apollos, Paul was not a "man of letters", at least not in the sense such a term might be used in Greco-Roman higher education. Nevertheless, he was an experienced speaker and a keen observer, and he knew what kind of arguments could be expected to hold up. Hence, it comes as no surprise that in the Roman letter Paul uses rhetorical forms such as comparisons (Ro. 2:12; 3:9; 5:12-17; 8:18), deductions (Ro. 1:24; 3:20; 4:16; 5:1, 12; 8:1, 12; 9:18; 13:5, 10; 14:13), hypotheses (Ro. 3:1, 3, 5-9; 4:2-3; 9:22-23) and the like.[20] Hence, Luke Johnson is quite correct to say that Romans is "a sample of Paul's teaching within his school of delegates and fellow workers."[21] In rhetorical style, Paul's states his thesis (Ro. 1:16-17), immediately addresses its antithesis (Ro. 1:18—3:20), and then restates his thesis (Ro. 3:21-31). He follows by demonstrating his thesis by example (Ro. 4:1-25) and completing his exposition (5:1-21). Finally, he systematically addresses the objections (6:1—11:3).[22]

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[19] D. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), pp. 128-129.

[20] J. Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2003), pp. 150-155.

[21] Johnson, p. 318.

[22] Johnson, p. 318.

The Opening (1:1-17)

The Opening Formula (1:1-7)

The opening of Paul's letters, with few exceptions, follow a stereotypical pattern common to other letters in the 1st century. A wealth of Greek and Latin examples of letters from approximately the time of Paul demonstrate that, in ancient just as in modern times, conventional letter paradigms ruled the day. In all likelihood, letter writing was taught to boys in their secondary education, and as early as the 3rd century BC there appears Demetrius of Phalerum's work *On Style*.[23] The conventional style commonly included the name of the sender, the addressee and a salutation, followed by a wish for health and sometimes a thanksgiving with reference to a deity. Such elements could be elaborated or amplified in various ways. Letters closed with a farewell formula and greetings to mutual friends.[24] Paul's Roman letter follows in kind, and like other letters in the New Testament, he generally followed the style and form of the moralists' and philosophers' letters, that is, his letters consisted largely of instruction and exhortation.

As is customary, Paul introduces himself by his Roman *cognomen* Paullus (1:1). This introduction reflects upon his calling to be an apostle to the non-Jews, so even though Paul had a Jewish name (Saoul or Saulos), he never used it in his epistolary correspondence. In his opening greeting, Paul anticipates several important themes upon which he will enlarge later. He is an apostle divinely called (1:1). His message is the good news already embedded in the codified preaching of the Hebrew prophets (1:2). The core of his message was about God's Son, humanly descended from the line of David, but validated as God's Son, the heavenly Lord, by the Holy Spirit's miracle in raising him from the dead (1:3-4).[25] Paul's particular mission was to the Gentiles, and the Romans belonged to the scope of this mission (1:5-6). His readers could be assured of God's love and their calling to a life separated to the service of God, that is, "called to be holy ones" (1:7a). He concludes his opening with the characteristic Christian blessing of "grace and peace" from the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Several salient points should be observed in this opening, some implicit and some explicit. First, Paul's use of the term δουλος (= slave) explicates his own self-

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[23] S. Stowers, *ABD* (1992) IV.290-291.

[24] Stowers, pp.291-292.

[25] The expression "Spirit of holiness" (1:4a) is a genitival Semitism that equates to the more common Greek expression "Holy Spirit," cf. Brown, p. 565, footnote #15. That Paul uses the plural νεκρῶν (= dead ones) simply connects the resurrection of Jesus to the general belief in the resurrection of all at the end of the age. Christ's resurrection, as Paul expresses it elsewhere, is a kind of "first-fruits" of this final resurrection (1 Co. 15:20, 23).

perception in relationship to Jesus Christ, who is his κυριος (= Lord). Wright is surely correct to observe that translating this word as "servant" may blunt its meaning. As a slave, Paul "had no rights, no property, and no prospects." Slaves existed to do what they were told, and Paul existed as the slave of the Messiah-King of David's family![26] Second, Paul was an αποστολος (= apostle, emissary), a term he used especially to describe those who had personally seen the risen Christ (cf. 1 Co. 9:1; 15:5-8) and hence were commissioned as his special representatives (cf. Ro. 16:7; 1 Co. 4:9; 12:28a; Ep. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). In addition, Paul had been marked off from the others as one sent to the Gentiles. While some apostles, such as James, Peter and John, had as their primary concern the Jewish constituency, Paul was called to the non-Jews (Ga. 1:6-9; cf. Ac. 22:21; 26:17-18). This feature was the ground of his mission to the west and the ground of his appeal to the Romans themselves.

Paul's message concerned the "obedience of faith" (1:5). How to translate the phrase "obedience of faith" has been something of a challenge, since there is more than one grammatical possibility, and each translator brings to the table his own theological preferences as well as his assessment of Paul's larger theology in the Roman letter. Many translators take the phrase as a subjective genitive, that is, that faith is the agent of action leading to obedience. Hence, the NIV renders it "the obedience that comes from faith" (also, Weymouth, Williams). Others take it as an genitive of apposition, such as, "faith and obedience" (NEB, TEV, Goodspeed, Cranfield) or as a genitive of quality (e.g., "obedient faith", NAB). Most standard translations simply leave the genitive undefined (RSV, NASB, KJV, ASV, JB).

Be that as it may, obedience cannot be severed from faith, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer cogently observes, "It is really unfaithfulness to the Bible to have the first statement without the second," [i.e., faith without obedience]. Grace without discipleship is cheap grace. It is not so much the grace of Christ as it is the grace "we bestow on ourselves."[27] "Cheap grace means justification of sin but not of the sinner," and it is "the mortal enemy of our [Protestant] church."[28]Obedience and faith become mutually defining terms, so that, as Bonhoeffer expressed it, "Because Jesus is the Christ, he has authority to call and to demand obedience to his word. Jesus calls to discipleship, not as a teacher and a role model, but as the Christ, the Son of God." Hence, "Only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe."[29] The interpreter must guard against, on the one hand, any capitulation to works-righteousness, as though there was something a person could do to earn God's favor, and on the other

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[26] N. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," *NIB* (2002) X.415.

[27] D. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), p. 44.

[28] Bonhoeffer, pp. 43, 63.

[29] Bonhoeffer, pp. 57, 63.

hand, an antinomianism that makes faith merely assent to an intellectual proposition.

Finally, as is frequent in Paul, he mentions both God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. This coupling of God and Christ side-by-side becomes a christological norm that underlies the eventual formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Though Paul does not present a developed trinitarianism, he offers the "raw data" for later Christian trinitarianism.[30]

Paul's Intent to Come to Rome (1:8-15)

By the late 50s AD, the Roman church already had established a reputation, and in fact, their faith was reported "all over the world", by which Paul probably means the Mediterranean world (1:8). Presumably the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius was a primary vehicle for this burgeoning reputation. For his own part, Paul asserted that his task of carrying the gospel was an act of worship (lit., "God…whom I worship in my spirit").[31] God was his witness that in his regular prayers he upheld the Roman Christians (1:9). One of his earnest desires before God was that someday he would be able to come to Rome, and now he believed that his prayer was about to be answered (1:10). In coming to Rome, Paul wanted to be able to share his spiritual gift with the Christian community there, and he specifies clearly that he has in mind the gift of mutual encouragement (1:11-12; cf. 12:8). Perhaps this includes the gift of prophecy, since the prophetic gift was one means of strengthening, encouraging and comforting (cf. 1 Co. 14:3).

For a long time Paul had wanted to come to Rome, and in fact, previously he had made plans to do so without success (1:13a). His motive was that he might be able to advance the proclamation of the gospel there. There is no suggestion of inadequacy on the part of the Roman Christian community; it is simply that Paul wanted to participate in evangelizing the teeming masses in the largest city in the world (1:13b). His special mission from God was to preach to non-Jews, both Greeks and foreigners,[32] both intellectual and non-intellectual.[33] To all non-Jews Paul had been placed under obligation by his unique calling (1:14). It was as though in his knowledge of the gospel he possessed something that was rightfully theirs. Hence, he was eager to come to Rome to preach (1:15).

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[30] B. Witherington III, "Christology," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), pp. 103-104.

[31] The coupling of the verb λατρεύω (= serve) with God as the object of the verb normally means to worship or to carry out religious duties, cf. G. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1994), p. 485. Wright appropriately questions the dynamic equivalency in the NIV ("whom I serve with my whole heart"), *NIB* (2002) X.422.

[32] Lit., "barbarian," which refers to someone who was not Greek or Roman, cf. *BAG* (1979) p. 133.

[33] The expression "wise and foolish" denotes people who differs in education and native intelligence. It is not necessarily pejorative.

The Thesis (1:16-17)

If Paul's Roman letter follows the general rhetorical form of a diatribe, then these two verses form the thesis for the argument in the entire book. Each of three introductory phrases is prefaced by the Greek conjunction γαρ (= for), and together they form a tight logic in which the final statement becomes the keystone upon which all the preceding statements are built.

> ***for*** *I am not ashamed of the gospel…*[34]
> ***for*** *it is God's power to salvation to everyone believing…*
> ***for*** *in it a righteousness from God is revealed…*
> ***as it is written:*** *the righteous will live by faith.*

The foundation of Paul's argument, then, is the quotation from the prophet Habakkuk (Ha. 2:4b).

Addressing first the foundational statement of Habakkuk, it is fair to say that Paul's use of this quotation has generated an enormous discussion, especially concerning what the prophet originally meant as compared with what Paul meant. Habakkuk's complaint to God was offered in the face of the Babylonian invasion of Judah. Essentially, his question was the age-old problem of why God allowed evil to prevail. Yahweh's response was that the answer to the problem of evil would not appear soon, but rather, at "the end," an unknown future time in God's sovereign appointments. Nevertheless, though the resolution to the problem of evil would not appear immediately, it would surely come (2:3). In the meantime, Habakkuk (and indeed, all God's people) must be content to wait. Habakkuk's earlier determination to stand watch on the city's tower to await Yahweh's answer now becomes a symbol for the waiting of the righteous through the ages for God's final justice. This message to wait would be recapitulated in the teachings of Jesus (Lk. 18:7-8) and the writings of the apostles (2 Th. 1:5-10; Rv. 6:9-11).

Now for the message itself. Yahweh's answer was in two parts, one directed toward Babylon, who becomes a symbol for all the aggrandizing power-seekers of the world, and the other directed toward the people of God who await divine justice. The message to Babylon is a description of the empire-builder's unrelenting pride and ruthless use of power. Babylon is drunken, arrogant, restless, greedy and bent on conquest (2:4a, 5). For reasons known only to God, Babylon will be allowed to invade and conquer.

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[34] The NIV has omitted the "for" at the beginning of 1:16, but the link between this clause and what precedes it is as follows: *I am so eager to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome* ***for*** *I am not ashamed…*

Habakkuk, then, lives between the times—between the promise of justice and the fulfillment to come. How is he to live, and indeed, how are any of the righteous to live in the presence of such unrestrained evil? Yahweh's answer is that the righteous person must live by faith, that is, he must wait in faith for God's own time and way (2:4b). The Hebrew word *emunah* (= faith), which is related to the word "amen," refers to the inner attitude that motivates faithfulness and continual conscientiousness.[35] The righteous person must not lapse into the self-aggrandizing ways of the pagans, but must remain steadfast in his trust toward God. The fact that the message of faith is sandwiched as a parenthesis in the midst of the description of Babylon's conquests serves as a structural pointer to the reality that the righteous, also, live in the parenthesis between promise and fulfillment. In the end, however, Habakkuk could rely on God's moral character. Sin would not go unpunished, and the righteous faithful would not go unrewarded. In the meantime, the just person must live by his faith! In Romans, therefore, Paul quotes this passage to substantiate his thesis that it is precisely by this life of faith that a person stands justified before God (Ro. 1:17; cf. Ga. 3:11). Does Paul use this passage properly? That is the question.

Some assert that Habakkuk's statement meant only that the righteous person would survive the impending political catastrophe by being loyal to Yahweh, and further, that this was something quite different from what Paul intended. However, is such a construction the only thing that Habakkuk intended? Probably not! In fact, there would be many Israelites who would not survive the coming invasion, whether they were righteous or not, and the idea of survival should be elevated above merely the ramifications of political expediency. This is the burden of the epiphany at the end of Habakkuk's book—that even though catastrophe happens, there is the hope of rising above earthly disasters to spiritual heights (Ha. 3:16-19). The statement that the righteous person lives by his faith ultimately aims at *spiritual* survival, not merely temporal survival.

But why did God appear in an epiphany to Habakkuk? Was this not something more profound than merely a divine display of raw power? The answer is a resounding yes! God's ancient appearance as a warrior to deliver his people (Ha. 3:9-11) was the manifestation of his judgment on the nations (Ha. 3:12) and his deliverance of his people from their bondage (Ha. 3:13-15)! In the exodus, Pharaoh, the god-symbol of Egypt, had been crushed, along with his cohorts. These, in turn, become symbols for the future as well as the past. The God who once revealed himself as a man of war against Egypt (cf. Ex. 15:3) would yet split open the heavens to save his anointed. This hint at the future is suggested when the poet shifts, just for

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[35] A. Jepsen, *TDOT* (1974) I.316-319.

a moment, from the third person "them" to the first person "me" (Ha. 3:14a).[36] The vision here of the nations arrayed against Yahweh and "his anointed" is the same as the raging of the nations in Psalm 2 against Yahweh and his anointed. Here, as there, total triumph belongs to Yahweh.

This vision also becomes part of the answer to Habakkuk's complaint. Will God respond to evil in the world? Yes, he will (Ha. 1:5ff.; 2:6ff.)! He will judge the nations! When he judges them, will he allow his own righteous people to die (Ha. 2:12)? No, he won't! In the midst of his wrath he will remember them in mercy (Ha. 3:2b), just as he did in ancient times (Ha. 3:13)!

Habakkuk was overwhelmed by the power and immensity of this vision (Ha. 3:16a)! The very universe stood still at such a revelation of God (Ha. 3:11), and Habakkuk was reduced to a shuddering heap. What once happened to Pharaoh would happen to Babylon. What would happen to Babylon would happen to all the power brokers of the world (cf. Is. 2:12ff.). In response, Habakkuk humbly resigned himself to wait for the day of God's judgment on Babylon (Ha. 3:16b). In between the times—between the promise and its fulfillment—Habakkuk would rejoice in this future. Whatever hardships attended the present, whether drought or calamity, he would be joyful in the promise that God was his Savior (Ha. 3:17-18). Through God's strength, he would rise above the injustices of the present while living by faith (Ha. 3:19a). He would climb to the heights of faith with the feet of a deer (cf. Ps. 18:32-33//2 Sa. 22:33-34)!

So, is the spirit of Paul's discourse in Romans in harmony with the spirit of Habakkuk's prophetic word and vision? I assert that it is! Paul, too, is concerned with spiritual survival, and that survival will come only through absolute trust in the sovereign God, and especially, his redemptive work through Christ Jesus! It is an admirable use of Habakkuk's prophetic word, fully in keeping with the message of the ancient prophet!

Upon this foundation, Paul builds the links of his thesis. In the gospel of God' Son, the Father has revealed that for which Habakkuk waited. The thesis is this: a righteousness from God has been unveiled "from faith to faith,"[37] that is, it is based

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[36] The NIV renders this as "us," but it is singular in the Hebrew text.

[37] Grammatically, the phrase "righteousness of God" can be taken either as a subjective genitive, that is, the righteousness God gives, or as a genitive of quality, the righteousness God has. (The NIV rendering "a righteousness *from* God" takes it in the former sense.) In the end, however, the two ideas may not be mutually exclusive, since the righteousness God has becomes the gift God gives to those who believe. The ancient expression in the Psalms proceeded along exactly these same lines: *In you, O Yahweh, I have taken refuge; let me not be ashamed forever. Rescue me in your righteousness* (Ps. 71:1-2a).This was what Luther discovered in his study of Romans—that the phrase "righteousness of God" referred not to God's active punishment of the sinner, but rather, the gift of his righteousness to the believer, cf. M. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Mueller (rpt. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), p. 41.

on faith "from first to last" (so NIV). The problem of evil about which Habakkuk asked has been resolved in the cross of Jesus Christ. Judgment has been satisfied, and salvation has been given, not only for the Jew, but also for the non-Jew! What is required is simply to embrace what God has done by believing the good news.

It is because of this that the gospel itself is God's power for the salvation of those who believe. The power of salvation rests not in the ingenuity of the messenger, nor in fact, in the religious motions of the recipient. It lies in the message itself when it is embraced! The priority of "Jew first, then Greek" Paul will take up in detail in chapters 9-11 (cf. 15:8-9), but suffice it to say here that Paul maintains his respect for the covenantal traditions of Israel while never denying that this temporal priority in no way diminishes God's universal purpose.

Paul's Gospel (1:18 - 8:39)

For the balance of the next eight chapters, Paul sets forth his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, he can personalize it by calling it "my gospel" (2:16; 16:25; cf. 2 Ti. 2:8), that is, the message which derived from his special calling as the apostle to the non-Jews. By "my gospel" Paul's does not intend that his version was different than that of the other apostles. To the contrary, Paul was concerned that his message agreed with theirs so that, as he put it elsewhere, he did not "run in vain" (Ga. 2:1-2). James the Just, Peter and John all concurred that Paul was uniquely called to the non-Jews, just as they were called to the Jews, and by extending to Paul the "right hand of fellowship", they indicated their approval and agreement with Paul's message (Ga. 2:7-9).

The Basic Problem with the Human Race (1:18 - 3:20)

Paul will argue over the next several paragraphs that the basic problem with the human race is not ignorance, but rebellion and failure. Further, this rebellion and failure extends not merely to classes and categories of people, though it certainly includes such, but also to every single individual person. No one is exempt from this fundamental indictment. Paul's argument is syllogistic. He moves from the depravity of the Gentiles, to the depravity of the Jews, to the depravity of the entire race.

The Plight of Dehumanized Humans (1:18-32)

Paul begins with God's wrath. God stands against all evil, and he expresses this opposition by divine wrath. Divine wrath, which classical liberalism was inclined to minimize or even reject outright,[38] cannot be extracted from the gospel. It is

[38] H. Richard Niebuhr's scathing indictment of classical liberalism bears repeating: *A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross*, cf. H.

essential to the good news! If sin is not "that bad", then grace will not be "that good". It is God's refusal to capitulate to evil that becomes the ground for any real forward progress.

God's wrath is demonstrated against those who suppress the truth (1:18). The issue is not that humans do not know any truth, but rather, that in their wickedness they deliberately quell it. The very universe itself testifies to God at a fundamental level, and in rejecting this testimony, humans are culpable (1:19-20). Tradition going back through Luther, Aquinas and Augustine distinguished between general revelation and special revelation. By the former, they intended the elemental knowledge of God as the creator from whom flows the moral concept of good and evil. By the latter, they intended God's self-disclosure in sacred history, and especially, in Holy Scripture and the incarnation of the Son of God. The former is available to all people everywhere, but it is not sufficient in itself to be redemptive. The latter is thoroughly redemptive, and it comes by direct encounter with the message of Jesus Christ.[39] Nevertheless, the rudimentary knowledge of God that is available from the created universe, while not in itself redemptive, is sufficient to render humans as without excuse when they rebel against it. In his missions preaching, Paul understood this rudimentary knowledge of God as a divine call for humans to seek him (Ac. 17:24-27). Paul affirmed that even pagan poets were capable of understanding this basic level of revelation (Ac. 17:28).[40] Still, the human race has rebelled, and instead of seeking God, humans made gods to suit themselves (Ac. 17:29). They stubbornly refused to acknowledge God, they were not thankful for his gifts (cf. Ac. 14:15-17), but instead, they followed their minds and hearts into depravity and idolatry (1:21-23).

Paul here seems to be drawing upon traditional Jewish theology, especially the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon. His language is too strikingly similar to this ancient text to be coincidental.

> *For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?*

Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 193.

[39] For summaries and discussion of general and special revelation, see the articles by B. Demarest and C. Henry, *EDT* (1984) pp. 944-948.

[40] Paul here quotes from the *Hymn to Zeus* by the Stoic poet Aratus, *Let us begin with Zeus…for we are also his offspring.*

Wisdom of Solomon 13:5-9 (RSV)

Now follows a threefold statement of divine judgment, the expression of God's wrath. Each statement begins with the phrase, "Therefore God gave them over…" (1:24a, 26a, 28a). Paul's statement of divine wrath describes a judgment within history rather than simply at the end of history. Of course, such judgment within history anticipates a final judgment at the end (cf. 2:5, 16), but still, this judgment has already begun to be expressed in present human experience. As such, God has "given over" humans to the disastrous results of their own rebellion. This language of being "given over" is no more than what was said of ancient Israel, of whom God said that when they rebelled he "gave them over" to the covenant curses for disobedience resulting in exile (Eze. 20:21-26; cf. Ac. 7:42). Similarly, the whole human race has been "given over" to the results of its own folly.

If humans deliberately suppressed the truth of God's creatorship, trading true worship and thankfulness for idolatry, it should come as no surprise that they would degrade themselves even to the point of self-worship. The epitome of self-worship is to be found in same-sex relationships, and homosexual acts are forms of worshipping and serving in a pattern of one's own choosing rather than submitting to the pattern of the Creator (1:24-25). In doing so, humans have traded God's truth for a terrible falsehood. Humans diminish themselves so that they are less than they were intended to be, a distortion of the created order of humans as male and female (cf. Ge. 1:26-27; 2:7, 18, 21-25). The maleness and femaleness of the human race bear the image of God, and the distortion of this image by same-sex relationships becomes idolatrous dehumanization. Paul includes both male gay relationships and female lesbianism in this condemnation (1:26-27). Just as idolatry is the trading of truth for a lie with respect to the worship of God, Paul says that same-sex intercourse is contrary to the pattern of the created order, and hence, against nature.[41] The penalty for this perversion is dehumanization and self-degradation.

The contemporary gay apologetic attempts to strip this passage of its meaning by suggesting that Paul's language about what is contrary to nature only refers to heterosexuals who have left their heterosexual orientation in order to engage in homosexual behavior. Thus, it is argued, homosexual behavior is only wrong if one's

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[41] Much discussion has attended Paul's use of the term φυσις (= nature). In Greek literature, this term referred to any and everything that, by its origin or by observation of its constitution seemed to be a given, cf. H.Koster, *TDNT* (1974) IX.253. This word appears only rarely in the New Testament (as contrasted with Greek literature, where is appears frequently), and probably it functions within the framework of the natural order derived from creation, see extensive discussion in R. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), pp. 159-183, 254-270.

orientation is heterosexual, but for those whose orientation is homosexual, anything other than homosexual behavior would be wrong.[42] Such an interpretation stands the passage on its head. It attempts to explain Paul's words at the expense of ignoring the entire context of his argument.[43] N. T. Wright is correct to say, "Out of the many things Paul could have highlighted in the pagan world, he has chosen same-sex erotic practices as a classic example of pagan vice, but more particularly because it corresponds, in his view, to what humans in general have done in swapping God's truth for a lie."[44]

Along with same-sex relationships, Paul now offers a vice list of other behaviors also belonging to the category of things that "ought not to be done."

ἀδικία (αδικια = injustice, wickedness)
πονηρία (πονEρια = baseness, maliciousness)
πλεονεξία (πλεονεχια = greediness, coveteousness)
κακία (κακια = depravity, malignity)
φθόνος (φτηονοσ= envy, jealousy)
φόνος (φονοσ = murder, killing)
ἔρις (ερισ = strife, discord)
δόλος (δολοσ = deceit, treachery)
κακοήθεια (κακοEτηεια = malice, craftiness)
ψιθυριστής (πσιτηψριστEσ = whisperer, talebearer)
κατάλαλος (καταλαλοσ = slanderer, railer)
θεοστυγής (τηεοστψγEσ = God-haters)
ὑβριστής (ηψβριστEσ = insolent, violent)
ὑπερήφανος (ηψπερEπηανοσ = arrogant, haughty)
ἀλαζων (αλαζOν = boaster)
εφευρετής κακῶν (επηευρετEσ κακOν = contriver, inventer of evil)
απειθής γονευσις (απειτηEσ γονευσισ = disobedient to parents)
ἀσύνετος (ασψνετοσ = senseless, foolish)
ἀσύνθετος (ασψντητοσ = faithless, untrustworthy)
ἀστόργος (αστοργοσ = unloving, without affection)
ἀνελεήμων (ανελεEμOν= unmerciful)

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[42] W. Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," <http://users.adelphia.net/~jimswanson/biblesays.html>

[43] For a thorough discussion of this context, see R. Gagnon, pp. 229-302.

[44] Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.433.

As is customary in Paul's lists, this one does not intend to be exhaustive, but suggestive of the kinds of evils that prevail in the world of depraved humans. In behaving in these ways, humans degrade themselves, and the final quartet of indictments is admirably captured in the NIV's rendering: *senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless*(1:28-31).[45] This final charge reemphasizes the propensity of human rebellion. Such behaviors are the direct result of refusing to retain the knowledge of God (1:28). The problem, then, is not ignorance. Rather, the problem is that even though humans instinctively know the debilitation of such behavior—even that such sins deserve death—they both engage in them as well as justify others who join them (1:32).

God's Judgment is Fair (2:1-16)

Paul adopts the literary feature of diatribe, the rhetorical "you", throughout this next section, changing from the third person to the second person. As a rhetorical device, this "you" refers not to the Roman Christians *per se*, but rather, to an imaginary objector to his argument. It might include Roman Christians, of course (if the shoe fits, put it on), but primarily it is aimed at anyone who might contend that what Paul said about humanity in general does not apply to them individually. To the contrary, Paul says, it *does* apply to them! Further, God is absolutely fair in his judgment, both of Jews and non-Jews (cf. 2:11). The Roman world had its own share of moralists (Seneca would be a good example) who acknowledged the pervasiveness of evil in the world and urged self-criticism and a moral high ground.[46] Nevertheless, no such person was qualified to pass judgment on others without also passing judgment on themselves (2:1). God alone, whose judgment is based on his own divine perfection, is qualified to pass judgment (2:2-3). Indeed, God's tolerance, by which in past ages he "let all nations go their own way" (Ac. 14:16) and "overlooked such ignorance" (Ac. 17:30a), was itself a universal entreaty toward repentance (2:4; cf. Ac. 14:17; 17:27) in anticipation of a final day of justice (2:5).

The background for this section, then, is the eschatological judgment of the whole world about which the writing prophets of Israel spoke. The prophets predicted that "God has a day" of reckoning (Is. 2:12). To be sure, in many cases the predictions concerning this "day" anticipated the historical invasions of Assyria and Babylon, but beyond that, they looked to a day in which all the nations would face God's judgment.[47] Paul already has described God's wrathful judgment within history by which he gave people over to the evils of their own behavior, but now he focuses

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[45] These final four vices create an assonance in Greek, and the NIV captures this assonance better than any other translation.

[46] F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 87.

[47] See discussion in D. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions About the Last Days* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 30-36.

on God's judgment at the conclusion of history, a "day of God's wrath" when his righteous judgment will be revealed (2:5). Paul is equally clear that on this day God will judge all humans in light of the person of Jesus Christ, an essential feature of his understanding of the gospel (2:16; cf. Jn. 5:21-30; Ac. 17:31). Hence, the "good news" is not unconditionally good, for it also carries within it the concept of final justice, both good and bad.[48]

Here Paul offers one of the most complete descriptions of this final judgment to appear in the New Testament. What generally strikes Protestant readers as surprising, given their theological tradition of grace and faith, is that Paul describes this last judgment as proceeding entirely upon the grounds of works—what a person "does" rather than on the grounds of religious affiliation, religious ritual or even religious intellectual cognition (2:6-11). Of course, the reader must be aware that what Paul says here about final justice will be qualified by what he later says about salvation, which is by grace and faith. Nevertheless, while salvation is to be given on the basis of grace and faith, final judgment will be on the basis of "deeds", and Paul quotes Psalm 62:12 to support his thesis.

Longstanding Jewish tradition held that there was such a category as "righteous gentiles", that is, non-Jews who studied the Torah and observed many of the commandments in the Torah (especially those given to Noah, cf. Ge. 9:1-7), and who, according to Rabbi Joshua, would receive a share in the world to come.[49] In addition, the category of God-fearers, that is, those non-Jews who were sympathetic to the Jewish faith and who followed many Jewish practices though without becoming full converts, also speaks of Gentiles who in some measure followed the faith of ancient Israel.[50] Simon Peter said as much to some God-fearers in Caesarea Maritima (cf. Ac. 10:34-35). So, what is the standing of such people in view of God's coming day of judgment?

Paul explains. Since God does not show favoritism (2:11), it would be unfair for him to judge the nations by the full extent of the Torah, which was given to Israel. Hence, those who had not received the Torah would be judged apart from the Torah, while those under the Torah would be judged by the Torah (2:12). All people would be judged with respect to the light that was available to them. Still, the critical factor would not be merely the hearing of the Torah but the obedience of the Torah (2:13). Jews had no redemptive privilege simply because they were the people to whom the Torah was given. Similarly, Gentiles who had not received the Torah sometimes

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[48] Contra N. Punt, *Unconditional Good News* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

[49] J. Neusner and W. Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), p. 248 and M. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 166-176.

[50] L. Feldman, "The Omnipresence of the God-fearers," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1986) pp. 58-63.

lived by the moral principles resident in the Torah, and when they did so, they demonstrated that the ideals of the Torah could be implicit and instinctive, written on the human heart and conscience (2:14-15). While Paul probably would not argue for the infallibility of the human conscience, he certainly states unequivocally his belief in the human conscience as a witness to God's requirements. In the end, both groups, Jew and Gentile, will be judged fairly by God, who shows no favoritism. The priority of "Jew first, then Greek" (2:9-10) was a priority of privilege, since the Jews had received the Torah, but it emphatically was not a priority of preferential treatment. Both groups will be judged equally and fairly by their works, but members of each group will be judged with respect to the amount of revelation accorded them. God, alone, knows the inward side of humans—their deepest secrets—and all final judgment will be conducted by Christ Jesus (2:16).

Is Paul being merely hypothetical or theoretical here? Is it possible that there are persons in the world who seek "glory, honor and peace" outside the context of the ancient faith of Israel or the Christian message of Christ? If so, is it possible that they could be spared condemnation and given eternal life? At present, Paul does not specifically say whether or not anyone will be given eternal life or be condemned, either Jew or Gentile, on the basis of doing or not doing good works. What he does explain is the fair basis upon which all judgment will proceed. One must await the further development of his argument to answer these questions.

The Value of Jewishness (2:17-29)

Paul now pushes his argument forward. If God is totally impartial—if he offers no favored-nation status but will judge everyone equitably upon the basis of how much light he or she had received—was there any advantage in Jewishness at all? Oddly enough, most Christians would say, "No!" Paul, to the contrary, will say, "Yes" (3:1)! Before he does, however, he must expand on what he has said earlier, that is, that it is obedience to the Torah, not possession of the Torah, that will be decisive (cf. 2:13). This declaration flew in the face of popular Jewish sentiment. The general assumption was that because the Jewish nation was God's chosen people, they had privileged status. Centuries earlier, the prophets had inveighed against this notion through the remnant theology. The remnant theology—the concept that only some would survive to inherit the promised blessings—was by definition subversive to the notion that an Israelite was automatically accepted by God because of pedigree. To the contrary, the prophets preached that only a remnant would be saved (Am. 5:4-6, 14-15; Is. 4:3-6; 10:20-22; 11:10-16; 28:5; 37:32; Zep. 2:3; 3:12-13). John the Baptist highlighted this same theme when he challenged his listeners not to rely on their pedigree in Abraham's family: God could raise up children to Abraham from rocks on the river bank (Mt. 3:9//Lk. 3:8)! He did not need their pedigree!

Jesus, in similar fashion, said that one's paternal heritage would be reckoned by how one behaved rather than how one traced his genealogical record (Jn. 8:33-47). Nevertheless, in spite of these voices there remained an optimism that Jewishness was in itself a causal factor for salvation. While there were sharp disagreements between the various sects of second temple Judaism on religious praxis, there was general agreement that the one true God had chosen Israel as his people, and that by this choice their future salvation was secure. Trial and discipline might be their present circumstances, but the future was bright with redemptive hope.[51] Paul, now, addresses this unmitigated optimism by continuing his rhetorical diatribe with an imaginary, "You…Jew!"

The privilege of Jewishness was God's election of Israel for service. Choice for service, however, did not in itself imply moral superiority (2:17-20). All that Paul says here about the Jewish self-concept is similar to what he said elsewhere about himself and his life in Judaism (cf. Phil. 3:4-6). If there is privilege in being Jewish, such privilege results in added responsibility. It was not enough to have the Torah, one must live by the Torah! To boast of spiritual superiority in the midst of obvious moral shortcomings was arrogant and dangerous (2:21-23). Whether Paul has in mind any specific instances of Torah violation is not clear. Certainly there were some celebrated examples of sacrilege, such as when John Hyrcanus, a high priest from about a century and a half earlier, destroyed the Samaritan sanctuary.[52] It is likely that there were other suspect behaviors even closer to home, but Paul probably is not attempting to finger any of them. It is the general truth he has in view that Jews, in spite of their privilege, were capable of violating their own constitution. Paul climaxes his indictment by quoting Ezekiel's scathing rebuke: *God's name is blasphemed among the nations because of you* (2:24; Eze. 36:22; cf. 13:19; 20:9, 14, 22; 22:26; 36:20-23; 39:7). In the end, then, Paul sharply points up the supreme irony. God's choice of Israel for service was indeed to bring light to a dark world, but instead of becoming part of the solution, the Jews had become part of the problem. Paul's rhetoric is in the same vein as Jesus' statement, "If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness" (Mt. 6:23)! The ancient prophet made the same charge: *Who is blind like the servant of the Lord* (Is. 42:19b)?

Circumcision, the supreme badge of Jewishness, had no positive value at all for a Torah-violator. In fact, it became an indictment (2:25)! By contrast, Ezekiel had predicted a new cleansing, a new heart and a new spirit—in short, a new creation—and those who had been cleansed and made new on the inside would truly follow Yahweh's decrees and keep his laws (Eze. 36:25-27). Elsewhere Paul says, "Neither

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[51] N. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 272-279.

[52] Josephus also points out that among the non-Jews the name Jerusalem (*Hierosolyma*) derived from *Hierosyla*, a name for temple-robbing, cf. *Against Apion* 1.34 (311).

circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Ga. 6:15). It is this new creation that Paul sees among people who, though they were not circumcised, nevertheless by a new order were living out the fulfillment of this promise. A great reversal was in process! Those who were circumcised had abdicated their position of privilege! Those where were not circumcised not only were keeping the true spirit of the Torah, they also stood as a condemning witness to the Jewish nation that violated the Torah (2:26-27).

In the end, there were two kinds of Jews. There were pedigreed Jews, who could trace their bloodline back through the genealogical records of the past—those who were circumcised, who celebrated their election, who leaned upon the Torah and claimed the privileged position of being a guide for the blind and a light for those in darkness. This kind of Jewishness, marked by circumcision, was outward and physical. It assumed that right standing with God came by natural birth. However, there was another kind of Jewishness that did not depend upon such pedigrees, and in fact, this is the kind of Jewishness valued by God. This kind of Jew was a member of God's new creation, a man or woman who had received an inward circumcision of the heart. By a divine work of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to merely the formal declaration of a written code, this newly created Jew was fulfilling Yahweh's promise through Ezekiel: *I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws* (Eze. 36:27). Elsewhere, Paul will say, "It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). This is the sort of Jew who is commended not merely by others, but receives praise from God (2:29).[53]

In these statements, Paul clearly points toward the new community in Christ Jesus. God's ancient promises had been fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. God had given the messianic gift of the Spirit, changing hearts from the inside out, and inviting the nations to join the commonwealth of an Israel whose badge of distinction was not physical circumcision but a profound inward change. This, in turn, clarifies Paul's earlier statements about the Gentiles who though not having the Torah fulfill its requirements, since those requirements are written inwardly in their hearts and consciences (2:14-15).

God's Faithfulness, Israel's Unfaithfulness (3:1-8)

Paul already introduced the subject of Israel's unfaithfulness to God and to his covenant (cf. 2:24). Now, he pursues this theme more vigorously. The history of Israel is a history of repeated covenant failure, beginning with the transgressions of

[53] Paul resorts to an ironic pun here, since the word *Judah* means praise (cf., Ge. 29:35). The Judah/Jew (praise) who is marked by the outward sign receives only human praise. But the Judah/Jew who is marked by the inward work of the Spirit receives praise from God himself!

the first recipients of the covenant and continuing through the terrible anarchy in the period of the judges, the serial covenant violations by the kings of both the northern and southern nations, the abdication of the teaching responsibilities of the priests, and the moral breakdown among the citizens both in the north and south. That such covenant failures did not cease with the return from exile is painfully obvious in the dialogues of Malachi. In view of such thorough-going failure, was there any advantage at all in being Jewish (3:1)? Some, particular non-Jewish folk, might be willing to suggest that God's choice of Israel was more a curse than a blessing! Paul, however, will entertain no such notion. There was great advantage and blessing in God's choice of Israel, for it was in this choice—and particularly in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of Israel—that God demonstrated his own faithful character! The history of the Old Testament was not merely a history of Israel's failure; it also was a history of God's steadfastness!

The Jewish advantage began with the fact that the Israelites had received the very oracles of God (3:2).[54] Paul's reference here is not merely to the oracles from God through Moses to Israel, but more importantly, the oracles from God through Israel to the nations of the world.[55] This theme about Israel's calling to be a light to the world began with Abraham, whose posterity was to become the channel of blessing for all the nations (Ge. 12:1-3). The same ideal was repeated at Sinai, when the nation was called to be a "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:5-6), a statement directly suggesting Israel's mediatorial role between the nations and Yahweh. In spite of glimmers of hope toward this ideal in books like Ruth and Jonah, the general conclusion of the prophets was that Israel had failed in its mission. Instead of becoming a channel for reconciliation with God, Israel had profaned his sacred name among the nations (cf. 2:24). As Yahweh's servant, chosen to bring justice to the nations (Is. 41:8-9; 42:1, 6-7), Israel had been deaf, blind and inattentive to Yahweh's calling—in short, a colossal failure (Is. 42:18-22; 43:8-9). Nevertheless, God's larger purpose had never changed (Is. 45:22-24), and shortly, Paul will come back to it (cf. 4:11-17). In view of this failure, did the failure of Israel mean the failure of God? Not at all! God's faithfulness only stood out in sharp relief against Israel's lack of faithfulness, and Paul quotes the Septuagint text of Psalm 51:4 to demonstrate God's just condemnation of sinners (3:3-4).

This, in turn, raises another issue. If the failure of Israel serves to sharpen the

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[54] The term λόγιον (*λογια* = oracles, collection of sayings, revelations), found only here in Paul's letters, has an important nuance beyond simply "words" (and hence, the NIV did not improve the traditional translation of "oracles", so KJV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NASB, NRSV, ESV, etc.). It refers to a divine message entrusted by God to a messenger so that it may be told to others. In this case, the messenger was the people of Israel, and the recipients of this divine message were to be the nations.

[55] N. Wright, *NIB* (2002) x.453.

faithfulness of God, does God not gain by this contrast, and if so, why then should he condemn Israel? This is an "ends vs. means" argument, that is to say, if the end result is good (i.e., the bold emphasis of God's faithfulness), why should anyone care about the means (i.e., the unfaithfulness of Israel)? Does not the end justify the means (3:5-7)? Paul will have none of this sort of equivocation. If pushed to its ultimate limit, then all evil stands in bold relief against God's goodness, and such an argument leads to a general justification of evil to the point that God can no longer judge the world. One might as well say that evil should be pursued relentlessly in order to bring about a good end. Yet if the Hebrew Bible asserts anything, it surely asserts that God is the great Judge and that evil is to be shunned. Such argumentation was futile, and those who engaged in such sophistry deserved to be condemned themselves (3:8)![56] Apparently, some of Paul's opponents had bluntly accused him of antinomianism, because he championed the gospel of grace, and if such a rumor had reached Rome, Paul was at pains to reject it as quickly and emphatically as possible!

Both Jews and Non-Jews Are Guilty Before God (3:9-20)

Now Paul is ready to reach a preliminary conclusion. Already, he stated his case for the universal guilt of non-Jews. It is unlikely that he would have received any opposition from the Jews themselves on this part of the indictment. However, Paul went further. He charged that Israel failed in the covenant commission to be a light to the nations. It is not that the Jews had merely broken the laws of the covenant, they violated the larger, universal purpose of the covenant. Chosen to be God's servant-messenger to the nations, they instead profaned his name. In the end, both the Jews as well as the non-Jews stood condemned (3:9). Both, equally, were under the power of sin. For Paul, "sin" was not merely the aggregate of individual violations of legal statutes. Rather, sin was also a field of force. It was a broken relationship, not merely a broken rule. As a field of force, Paul tends to personify sin as a cruel slave-master so that he can say both Jews and Greeks (i.e., non-Jews) alike are "under" (**ὑπο**) sin. The collage of quotations from the psalms and prophets were particularly potent recriminations against the nation Israel itself, beginning with the introductory clause "it is written":

3:10b-12	Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecc. 7:20
3:13a	Ps. 5:9

[56] There may well be another issue underlying Paul's argument in 3:5-9, that is, the idea implicit in the LXX text of Ps. 51:4 that God and the sinner are metaphorically involved in a covenant lawsuit. If both are litigants, how can God also be the judge and executioner? Yet, God *is* the judge, for he will judge the world, cf. J. Dunn, *Romans 1-8 [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1088), pp. 133-134!

3:13b	Ps. 140:3
3:14	Ps. 10:7
3:15-17	Is. 59:7-8
3:18	Ps. 36:1

The piling up of quotations becomes the supporting evidence for Paul's charge. Like a prosecutor, Paul makes the basic charge that the Jews are no less guilty than the non-Jews, and here he assembles the evidence from the Jewish Scriptures. If the argument were advanced that these passages could be relegated to non-Jews and were not applicable to Israel, Paul countered that these very charges were from the Jewish Scriptures—and whatever the Jewish Scriptures say, they say to the Jews (3:19)! (By "the Law and the Prophets" Paul refers not so much to the Jewish canonical collections of Torah and Nebiim, but simply to the whole corpus of Hebrew Scriptures.)

Finally, the reader reaches a crescendo with word διότι (*διοτι* = for, because, therefore). Literally, *For by works of the law all flesh will not be justified before him* (= For by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before God).[57] By "all flesh" (NIV has "no one") Paul means all people, regardless of Jewish or non-Jewish origins. This assertion, another Old Testament allusion, comes from Psalm 143:2b. In speaking of the "works of the law", Paul finally answers the implicit question derived from 2:13: Is it possible that there are persons in the world who seek "glory, honor and peace", and if so, is it possible that they will be spared condemnation and given eternal life? The answer now is an emphatic, "No!" No one will be declared righteous by observing the works of the law, because no one actually has kept the requirements of the law, whether non-Jew or Jew![58] Such a thing could be argued theoretically, but the blunt fact is that from a practical viewpoint there was not even a single candidate!

The vocabulary of the law court—δικαιόω (*δικαιοO* = justify, acquit)—keeps pace with the general metaphor that began in ancient Israel with the covenant lawsuit. It forms the framework for Paul's whole discussion. If God is the judge, if

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[57] The Greek syntax of 3:20 is not compatible with English syntax, and virtually all translations depart from any attempt at word-for-word rendering.

[58] It is not without interest that the expression "works of the law", while missing from the rabbinic literature of the period, occurs in 4QMMT from the Dead Sea Scrolls, cf. M. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr. and E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 358-364. The Hebrew *ma'ase ha-torah* equals Paul's *ergon nomou* in Greek. A comparison between the contexts of MMT and Paul are fascinating, for MMT says that a person will be "reckoned righteous" by having done the works of the law, while Paul says that by such works no one will be justified. There is no reason to think that Paul was familiar with MMT, but it may well be that the phrase was used by some Jewish Christians who wished to assert that obedience to the Torah was necessary, cf. M. Abegg, "Paul, 'Works of the Law' and MMT," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1994), pp. 52-55.

Israel is now in the dock along with the non-Jews, and if the testimony of the ancient Scriptures is unrelenting in its accusation of guilt, then no one from "all flesh" could ever hope to be acquitted at the final assizes on the argument that he/she had kept the law. Any such attempt would be a counsel of despair. Instead, the best that could be said was that the Hebrew Scriptures made abundantly clear that sin was universal. This concept Paul will repeat and expand later (5:20a; 7:7ff). For the time being, however, it was enough to conclude that a possession of the Torah did not make possible any claim of exemption from divine condemnation. All, both Jew and non-Jew, stood guilty at the bar.

God's Saving Justice (3:21—4:25)

The Answer of Grace and Faith (3:21-26)

Paul has brought his readers to a terrible conclusion: all the world is guilty before God, both Jew and non-Jew, and all are worthy to be condemned. No one from "all flesh" has kept God's will. The non-Jews with limited revelation about God's Being had suppressed what truth they possessed and succumbed to idolatry. The Jews, who received special revelation from God in order to become the channel of blessing for the nations, terribly failed in their responsibility as well. The implicit question, in view of such universal guilt, is whether or not there is any way forward. Was there any hope? Paul's conclusion about universal guilt sets up his explanation of the gospel. Yes, there is a way forward, and that way forward has been accomplished in the saving justice of Jesus, the Christ. The introductory "But now" (**νυνὶ δὲ**) underscores Paul thesis that in spite of human failure, God took the initiative to save the condemned.

Once again, Paul employs his definitive phrase "a righteousness of God" (3:21a, 22a; cf. 1:17), and once more, the reader must decide whether this is a subjective genitive (i.e., the righteousness God *has*) or an objective genitive (i.e., the righteousness God *gives*, so NIV "righteousness *from* God"). Most Protestants, taking the lead from Luther, have interpreted it as an objective genitive. As such, it has been understood to refer to the gift of righteousness that God gives to the believer based upon his faith. Others have taken it in a covenantal sense, that is, the righteous quality of God's faithfulness to his covenantal promises, and in particular, his promise to bless all the nations through Abraham (i.e., subjective genitive).[59] While

[59] This is the position of N. T. Wright, who argues that this whole section concerns God's covenant faithfulness. According to Wright, the issue at hand is how non-Jews can now be considered part of the people of God, and the nuance of Paul's discussion is not merely about individual salvation but about the corporate inclusion of Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel. Hence, the righteousness of God is God's faithfulness to his original promise to Abraham (Ge. 12:3) in bringing together both Jew and Gentile into one people. The means of that union is the faithful obedience of Jesus Christ, cf. Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.464-472. Those who have faith in Christ's work are by

the quality of righteousness by which God maintains faithfulness to his covenant should not be ignored, in light of Paul's statement in Philippians 3:9, where he contrasts the "righteousness from law" (δικαιοσὺνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου) with "the [righteousness] through faith" (τὴν διὰ πίστις) and "upon faith" (ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει), it seems appropriate that here he has in focus the righteous gift God gives as well as the righteous way in which he gives it (see also, 1 Co. 1:30; 2 Co. 5:21). Here this is especially the case, since Paul speaks of a "righteousness of God through faith…to all the [ones] believing" (δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως…εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας). If this divine righteousness is something "to" the believer, it is not hard to see how it can refer to what God divinely confers as well as his covenant faithfulness in conferring it. Later in the letter, Paul will speak directly of the "gift of righteousness" (δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης, cf. 5:17). In any case, the corporate dimensions of the covenant should not erase the individual blessing of receiving the salvation promised in the covenant.

This gift of salvation was anticipated in "the Torah and the Prophets", a phrase that generally implies the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures (3:21b; cf. Mt. 5:17; 7:12; Lk. 24:44). In the next chapter, Paul will explicitly refer to this testimony as epitomized in Abraham and David. Here, he will concentrate on the ideas of atonement from the Torah and Isaiah's suffering Servant of the Lord who would vicariously die for the sins of others. The righteousness of God to which the Torah and the Prophets looked has now been revealed to be "through faith", that is, faith becomes the instrumental means by which God's salvation comes (3:22b). By "revealed" (πεφανέρωται = has been manifested), Paul refers not merely to the delivery of abstract knowledge, but rather, dependence upon the historical Christ event itself, the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. By "faith" Paul intends this utter dependence upon what God has done.[60] While traditionally the distinction between Jews and non-Jews had been understood in terms of the privilege of the former, such

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definition included in the eschatological people of God. Still, while the corporate dimension of the salvation in Christ Jesus is extremely important, it seems to this writer that Wright has not altogether made his case. Paul's singular uses of "the one" (τὸν = the [one], 3:26) and "a man" (ἄνθροπος = a man, 3:28) seem to focus on the individual, not merely the corporate, and if so, then the objective genitive interpretation seems to fit better, though as mentioned in connection with 1:17, the righteousness *of* God (the quality of his action) cannot be severed from the righteousness *from* God (the gift he gives). The exegesis of James Dunn is especially helpful in this regard, where he argues that it is *both* God's quality and God's gift that is in view rather than *either/or*, pp. 40-42.

[60] Again, some have argued that the genitive πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (= faith of Jesus Christ) means the faithfulness *of* Jesus Christ (subjective genitive), that is, his faithfulness to the covenant, cf. Wright, *IB* (1994) X..470. However, in light of Galatians 2:16, where the identical phrase is amplified by the succeeding clause, "We believed in Jesus Christ", it seems better to translate the phrase as an objective genitive, that is, "faith in Christ", cf. E. Harrison, "Romans," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10.41; M. Black, *Romans* [NCBC] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 66, and A. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 500.

a distinction could no longer hold. Failure and guilt on the part of both Jews and non-Jews meant that there was now no difference at all! The "all" who have sinned means both Jews and non-Jews (3:23). The glory of God which all have short-changed refers to the universal human failure to glorify God as God (cf. 1:21). Typically in Jewish thought, the fall of Adam (Ge. 3) was the moment when God's glory was lost.

> *And he* [Adam] *said to me* [Eve]*, 'O evil woman! Why have you wrought destruction among us? You have estranged me from the glory of God."*
>
> Life of Adam and Eve (Apocalypse), 21:6[61]

The idea of "falling short" draws deeply upon the Old Testament concept of sin, in which sin (חַטָּאת) is deviation, or more explicitly, "missing the mark".[62]

This universal human failure was confronted by God's saving action in Christ. At first glance one might suppose that the left side of the equation "all sinned" is to be balanced on the right with universal salvation (i.e., "all sinned; all are now saved"). However, the clear description of this salvation as being "through faith" cancels the possibility of automatic universalism. The "all" who are acquitted (justified) means both Jew and non-Jew, and as Paul said earlier, this salvation is "to all the ones believing" (cf. 3:22).

In 3:24-25, Paul uses three word pictures for salvation, one drawn from the law courts (justification), one drawn from the Torah regulations of buying something back (redemption), and the other drawn from the sacrificial system of the temple (propitiation/expiation). The first of these is a forensic term describing one who is pardoned by a judge. God is the great eschatological Judge (cf. 2:6), and the guilty person has been freely acquitted *even in advance of the last judgment*! The tense (present, passive, participle) is extremely important, because it means that this acquittal belongs to the present, that is, it is a present reality. Hence, what Paul describes is not "'sinlessness' in the sense of ethical perfection, but is 'sinlessness' in the sense that God does not 'count' man's sin against him (II Cor. 5:19)."[63] That this acquittal is done freely means that there was nothing inherent within any human to merit such an action. In short, this acquittal is a divine gift. The origin of this acquittal is within God's own person—it is by his grace—and it is not within the person of the accused.

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[61] While the date of this Jewish work can only be approximated to about the 1st century AD, it is generally placed in the early Christian period because of its parallels with early rabbinic traditions, its parallels with Josephus, and its popularity among early Christians, cf. M. Johnson, "Life of Adam and Eve: A New Translation and Introduction," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2.252.

[62] In Jg. 20:16, this word is actually used of a slinger missing the mark.

[63] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1951), I.276.

The second word picture, redemption, draws from the various Torah regulations in which persons or things could be recovered by a set price (cf. Lv. 25:23-31;Nu. 18:14-16; Ru. 2:20; 3:9, 12-13; 4:1-14). In the larger sense, the release of the Israelites from Egypt was understood to be a redemption (Ex. 6:6), and the people of Israel collectively were called "the redeemed of the Lord" (Ps. 107:2; 62:12). Likewise, the release of the Jews from Babylonian captivity was a redemption (Is. 43:1ff.; 51:11). Paul's use of this imagery here indicates that the salvation provided by Christ is the recovery of men and women from their guilt and condemnation. They are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (3:24b).

The third word picture comes from the ancient ritual of sacrifice. Blood is a synecdoche for death, and the faith of the believer is focused upon the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross (3:25a). Considerable debate has arisen over the term ἱλαστήριον (= propitiation/expiation, appeasement), which appears only here and in Hebrews 9:5 (though there is an additional group of other words that are related). The objection, vigorously urged by C. H. Dodd, is that the notion that God is angry and must be appeased is unworthy of the biblical conception of God, and particularly, of a salvation that derives from God's grace. Such an approach to the deity, they charged, smacks of paganism. Hence, the use of this term in the KJV is said to be "erroneous and misleading".[64]

To be sure, the term as used here does not follow the pagan notion of any crude appeasement of an angry deity, but nonetheless, one must be cautious not to extract God's wrath from the equation. It is precisely God's wrath revealed from heaven against all wickedness that is in view here (cf. 1:18), and it is precisely this wrath that is turned away in the death of Christ Jesus (cf. 5:9). The death of Jesus is described as the expression of God's righteousness and the punishment of sin (3:25b).[65] God's wrath against sin is not unworthy of his holiness nor does it cancel out his love! Because the term is used of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant, the NIV renders it "sacrifice of atonement," but the marginal dynamic equivalency reads "as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin."[66] The germ of this thought lies in the annual ritual of Yom Kipper, the Day of Atonement for the whole nation of Israel (Lv. 16), and the ancient Servant Songs in Isaiah, where Yahweh's Servant was offered up as a guilt offering (Is. 52:15; 53:10b) in behalf of others (Is. 53:4-6, 11-12). In his death, the Servant was crushed according to God's

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[64] R. Abba, *IDB* (1962) 3.920-921.

[65] By translating δικαιοσύνη in 3:25 as justice, the NIV obscures the fact that this is the same word used all along for the righteousness of God.

[66] For a much fuller discussion, see L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 144-213.

will (Is. 53:10a). Later, Paul will speak of Jesus as "given up" (4:25), the same language as appears in the LXX rendering of Isaiah 53:6, 12. Still later, Paul will say that Jesus' death was for "the many", the same language as appears in Isaiah 53:11-12). Still later, Paul will quote Isaiah 53:16 (10:16) and Isaiah 52:15 (15:21). Hence, N. T. Wright is exactly on target to say that Paul had this ancient prophetic passage in mind.[67]

In the end, then, the death of Jesus was a demonstration of God's divine justice (3:26). He acted in covenant faithfulness. Though human violations in previous eras had not been punished because of God's clemency, their just punishment was meted out in the death of Christ. The term ἀνοχή (= forbearance, clemency) was used earlier in 2:4, where Paul spoke of God's kindness, tolerance and longsuffering in the face of human sin, a kindness aimed at leading sinners to repentance. Still, such divine patience could not be extended indefinitely without compromising God's sense of justice. Hence, the punishment for the world's sin was meted out upon an innocent substitute, God's one and only Son. In this punishment, God's justice was vindicated and his gracious compassion was extended. He is both just (because he did not leave sin unpunished), and he is gracious (because he acquits the person who puts his faith in Jesus Christ).[68]

The Consequences of God's Saving Justice (3:27-31)

Earlier, Paul chastised his fellow Jews for bragging about their relationship to God (2:17). Now, he poses the rhetorical question. In view of universal guilt, and particularly in view of God's acquittal of the guilty "freely by his grace," how could anyone possibly boast (3:27)? There certainly is no longer any favored-nation status for Jews! Such boasting had been closed off! Paul's use of **νόμος** (= Torah, instruction, law, principle) seems to play upon the range of ideas including the ancient Torah and its role of instruction. Literally, the passage in 3:27 reads:

> *Where therefore [is] the boasting? It was shut out! Through what law(**νόμος**)? Of works? No! But through a law (**νόμος**) of faith..*

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[67] Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.475.

[68] Arminian theology has resisted the idea of penal substitution, preferring instead to say that Christ suffered for us, but he was not punished for us. The Arminian contention is that if Christ was punished for all humans, then such an action would inevitably lead to universalism so that no one would ever be consigned to eternal perdition. Arminians argue that there can be either punishment or forgiveness, but there cannot be both, cf. J. Grider, *EDT* (1984) p. 80. However, such a construction does not do justice to Paul's language in 3:25-26, where the very point Paul makes is concerning the punishment of sin.

In other words, there is a Torah (instruction) based upon works, and there is a Torah (instruction) based upon faith. The former, epitomized in the Dead Sea Scrolls 4QMMT, held that a person would be reckoned righteous by having done the works of the law (see footnote #58). The latter, demonstrated in the death of Jesus, declares that it is through faith that a person is reckoned righteous apart from observing the law (3:28)!

The final thrust is this: God is not a provincial deity! If a person was reckoned righteous only by doing the works of the Torah, as advocated in 4QMMT, then God would be the deity of only the Jews, for only the Jews were given the Torah. Yet, even the Jews themselves held that God was not provincial, and therefore, his sovereignty over the entire universe and all its peoples demanded that there be a way to be reckoned righteous other than simply by Torah observance. (2:29). *That way is by faith!* The object of that faith is Jesus Christ, especially his atoning death. The way of faith is equally applicable to both Jew and non-Jew, the circumcised and uncircumcised respectively. The Torah itself is capsuled in the *shema* (Dt. 6:4), for if there is only one God, then he must certainly be the God of all the nations, since he created the whole universe. (3:30). Does this mean, then, that the Torah is destroyed? Absolutely not! If God is one, and if his oneness means that all the families of the earth are under his sovereignty and are destined to be blessed in the same way (i.e., by faith), then this conclusion is necessary if one is to uphold the Torah. Only in this way can the Torah be vindicated. God's promise to Abraham concerned all the families of the earth (Ge. 12:3), not just the Jewish family! Paul will now take up Abraham in detail as the father of all who believe, whether Jewish or non-Jewish.

Abraham and David, the Prototypes of Justification by Faith (4:1-8)

There are two ways to translate the opening of chapter 4, and unfortunately, the NIV does not do justice to either of them by translating κατὰ σάρκα (= according to the flesh) as "in this matter". The first option, followed by most English translations, takes Abraham as the subject of the infinitive "to be found" (εὑρηκέναι). It renders the passage so as to pose a question about something Abraham discovered.

> *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?* (NASB, etc.)

The second takes Abraham as the object of the infinitive and takes the second person plural subject from the verb "shall we say" (ἐροῦμεν). Here, the passage

poses a question about something we discovered concerning Abraham.[69]

> *What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?* (NIB)

Translation looms large in that the entire dynamics of the passage turn upon this point. If one follows the first translation, the issue is simply about how Abraham discovered that justification came by faith rather than by works. If one follows the second translation, the issue is about who are Abraham's children. Are they only those whose bloodlines descend from Abraham (i.e., "according to the flesh"), or are they the entire company of people, Jewish or non-Jewish, who emulate the faith of Abraham. The second translation does not eliminate the subject of justification by faith, but it puts the question into a larger context that one finds in several of Paul's letters, that is, the issue of whether or not one must become a Jew in order to become a Christian. Here, we will follow the second translation as the better one, since contextually it seems to fit Paul's overall concern in this letter about the relationship between Jews and Christians.

The question, then, is this: what is the essential nature of Abraham's fatherhood? Is it to be defined by pedigree and Jewish tradition or is it to be defined by faith? Paul is emphatic: it must be defined by faith, and certainly not by works of the Torah (4:2)! The Jews' boast was that they were God's people simply because they had received the Torah (cf. 2:17-20), and therefore, that righteousness is gained through the works of Torah. If this were so, it would mean that Abraham's fatherhood was restricted to "the flesh", that is, his natural progeny. Such a boast might hold with other Jews, but it would hardly pass muster with God! Paul uses the statement in Genesis 15:5-6 as his primary text to explain why this could not be.

When Abraham received God's promise about his offspring becoming as numerous as the stars of the heavens, he "believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." For Paul, this promise about progeny in such incredible numbers pointed toward something far more profound than the natural descendants of the patriarchs. It pointed toward the overarching divine purpose first expressed in the covenant formula, "In you all families of the earth will be blessed" (Ge. 12:3). If this was true, then the fatherhood of Abraham was not restricted to natural pedigree (or, as he says, "according to the flesh"). In fact, Abraham himself becomes the first prototype for the righteousness God credits by faith (4:3). As a pagan (cf. Jos. 24:2), Abraham certainly did not earn his way to God as though he were being paid wages.

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[69] See extensive discussion in R. Hayes, "'Have We Found Abraham to Be Our Forefather According to the Flesh?' A Reconsideration of Rom. 4:1," *NovT 27* (1985) 76-98.

God's call to Abraham in no way could be construed as a divine obligation, since Abraham was an "ungodly", uncircumcised worshipper of others gods (4:4). Instead, Abraham the "ungodly" was called by God's grace, and when Abraham trusted this divine grace, God marked Abraham's balance sheet as "righteous". Righteousness was not credited to Abraham because Abraham found God; rather, God found Abraham! Righteousness was God's gift of grace to Abraham when he believed the promise (4:5). In this sense, at least, Abraham's journey to faith more nearly approximated the journey of the non-Jew to faith. Both journeys began in paganism, and both journeys were completed by trusting in God's promises.

The second prototype for the crediting of righteousness by faith comes from David in Psalm 32. In the LXX, the Greek text uses the same verb "to reckon" or "to credit" (λογίζομαι) as in Genesis 15:6. Here, however, the passage offers the contrast that God "does not credit" a man's sin against him, because he has forgiven him his sin (Ps. 32:2). The blessedness of such grace is twofold. On the one hand, God's does not credit a man's sin against him, and on the other, he does credit a man's trust in God's promise as righteousness. Both Abraham and David agree that righteousness is established apart from works of the Torah (4:6-8).

For Whom is this Blessedness Intended (4:9-15)?

Now comes the logical question. If God credited righteousness to Abraham because he trusted in God's promise, even though he was from a pagan background, and if God forgave David's sin and refused to reckon it against him, even apart from any works of the Torah, what are the implications in a modern sense? Was the blessing of forgiveness and the reckoning of righteousness only for those who performed the works of the Torah (i.e., Jews), or was it much broader (4:9)? For Paul, the sequence of Genesis 15:6 and the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17 was decisive! God reckoned righteousness to Abraham *before he was even circumcised* (4:10)! Therefore, Abraham's righteousness could never on any account be construed as proceeding along the lines of Torah observance. The ritual of circumcision, which was instituted after God reckoned Abraham righteous, served not as the means of righteousness, but rather, as a marker or pointer to the righteousness Abraham already had received (4:11a). Hence, it should never be supposed that one could only receive the covenant blessing of Abraham and the forgiveness of sins by becoming part of the circumcised community, because Abraham himself, the first prototype, was declared righteous even while he was uncircumcised! Abraham was included in the covenant community and the covenant promises *before* he was circumcised.

Paul's observation had huge ramifications! It meant that Abraham's fatherhood was not confined to Jewishness or circumcision. Rather, he was the father

of *all who believe but have not been circumcised*! Just as Abraham was reckoned righteous while he was uncircumcised, so also, all who believe in Christ Jesus are reckoned righteous, even non-Jews. They have become part of God's covenant community, even though they were not circumcised (4:11b). With respect to Jewishness, Abraham certainly was the father of the Jewish people, *but not in the conventional way in which this fatherhood was assumed.* Conventionally, Abraham's fatherhood was perceived ethnically by pedigree. Paul, to the contrary, asserted that Abraham's fatherhood must be defined by faith. His fatherhood, even for Jews, is directly connected to their faith. It was not circumcision itself which was decisive, even for Jews, but it was the "walking in the steps of faith"—the kind of faith Abraham exhibited even before he was circumcised—that was decisive (4:12). Whether or not Paul was here also thinking of baptism as the corresponding Christian marker pointing to covenant membership can only be conjectured, though in the Colossian letter, at least, he specifically makes such a parallel (Col. 2:11-12). If so, this passage certainly addresses a longstanding controversy about baptism. Baptism, like circumcision, is a maker pointing to forgiveness, righteousness and membership in the covenant community, but baptism is not the effective cause that establishes any of these things. Rather, faith is the effective cause! In any case, circumcision has value insofar as it points to the life of faith. It functioned for Abraham as a sign pointing to his faith. When circumcision does not point to the life of faith, or more specifically, when one assumes that circumcision is an end in itself, it becomes a condemnation (cf. 2:25).

What was true of circumcision was equally true of the Torah.[70] The ancient promise that Abraham would be the "heir of the world" (Ge. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18) did not come at Sinai but centuries before Sinai and Moses. The promise was given when all Abraham could do was believe it, so that it was truly a "righteousness of faith" (4:13). Traditionally, of course, the Jews argued that the heirs to God's promise, that is, themselves, were those who lived by the Torah. Gentiles were outside the Torah, so they were perceived to be, as Paul says elsewhere, estranged from the "covenants of promise" (Ep. 2:11-12). However, this view of inheritance—that only those under the Torah were heirs—would mean that Abraham's faith was worthless and the promise of the blessing of salvation was empty (4:14). Abraham was not under the Torah, and the blessing of salvation had been promised to all the families of the earth! Paul has just argued that even the Jews were Torah-violators (cf. 3:9-20). So, if only those who lived by the Torah would be heirs, no one at all would be an heir, including the Jews! The only thing remaining was divine wrath, which God revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness (4:15a; cf. 1:18; 2:8-9).

[70] The NIV's translation "law" should not be taken to refer to law as a general principle, but rather, the Torah as the specific law given to the Israelites.

Abraham, by contrast, could not be condemned as a Torah-violator, since the Torah had not been given to him (4:15b). Similarly, non-Jews who were not under the Torah could not be condemned as Torah-violators. They were therefore eligible for membership in God's family, even apart from the Torah.

Abraham's Family, the People of Faith (4:16-21)

Everything points to a single conclusion: God's covenant family was not to be delineated by pedigree, circumcision or Torah observation. Rather, it was to be defined by faith! Paul's clipped structure in the Greek text, "Therefore [it is] of faith, so that [it is] according to grace" (Διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ πίστεως ἵνα κατὰ χάριν) presses home his point in staccato fashion. The promise of blessing to the nations is guaranteed to *all* Abraham's offspring, not merely to those under the Torah but to those who emulate Abraham's faith. In short, *Abraham is the father of us all*, and this means Jew and non-Jew alike so long as they believe the gospel (4:16).

To clinch his argument, Paul quotes God's assertion that he made Abraham the father of many nations (Ge. 17:5). For Paul, the "many nations" must imply a broader outline than merely Jewishness. It specifically means all those who believe in Christ Jesus, both Jew and non-Jew. All who believe like Abraham believed are part of God's covenant family (4:17a)! The God in whom Abraham believed is the one who was not bound by conventions. He gives life to the dead (a comment on resurrection)[71] and calls into existence things that do not exist (a comment on God as the Creator). These two assertions recall the resurrection of Christ Jesus on Easter and the new creation through salvation (cf. 2 Co. 5:17). Already, Paul began this letter with a powerful statement that Jesus was declared to be God's Son by his resurrection (cf. 1:4). Later, he will expand the idea that God can call things into existence that do not exist when he appeals to Hosea's oracle in which God will "call them 'my people' who are not my people" (cf. 9:25; Ho. 2:23).

Though Abraham had no earthly reason to hope for a fulfillment to God's promise, given that he and Sarah were old and had no children, he yet embraced God's promise that he would be the father of many nations, and he trusted in God's word that his offspring would be multiplied like the stars in the sky (4:18). He acknowledged that in ordinary human terms it all seemed impossible for two people so old to have a child, but in spite of every natural reason to doubt, he still believed (4:19)! When Paul asserted that Abraham "did not waver", some have suggested that his contemplation about making a slave his heir (Ge. 15:2-3), and later, the taking of Hagar as his wife (Ge. 16:1-4), were signs of a weak faith. Not at all! It was precisely

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[71] Part of the regular recitation of the Eighteen Benedictions in the synagogue service included the phrase, "You make the dead alive".

because Abraham believed God's promise that he was willing to explore any feasible means toward its fulfillment. The original promise (Ge. 12:1-3) that God would make Abram a great nation and bless the nations through him theoretically might have included an arrangement with his slave, and it was only when Abram considered adopting his slave that God clarified the promise by saying, "A son coming from your own body will be your heir" (Ge. 15:4). Later, when Sarai presented to Abram her slave wife, Hagar, Abram was operating within the context that the heir would be a son "from his own body". A child by Hagar certainly fit such a stipulation. Only now, God further stipulated that this promised son would be born through Sarah (Ge. 17:15-19). So, it was true. Abraham lived in faith toward all that he knew as soon as he knew it (4:20-21).

N. T. Wright suggests a striking contrast between Abraham's faith and the original description of the downward spiral of rebellious humans.[72]

Abraham believed in God, the Creator (4:17)

Humans rebelled against God, the Creator (1:20, 25)

Abraham gave glory to God (4:20)

Humans refused to give glory to God (1:21)

Abraham acknowledged God's power (4:21)

Humans knew about God's power but refused to acknowledge it (1:20)

Abraham and Sarah honored each others bodies in the natural order of creation (4:19)

Humans dishonored each others' bodies through same sex relationships (1:26-27)

The Climax of God's Saving Justice (4:22-25)

Paul now draws to a close the first section of his letter. He has demonstrated that the problem with the human race is rebellion. Even though the non-Jews had not received the Torah, God had revealed to them enough of himself in the creation to made clear that they had rebelled. The Jews, likewise, had terribly failed in their mission as a light to the nations. In the end, God would judge both fairly, the Jews by the Torah and the non-Jews by the amount of light they had received. Both had fallen short, and both deserved condemnation. Would God's promise of blessing to the nations then fail? Not at all! The covenant God, who was always faithful, had established in the very beginning with Abraham that the critical definition of God's

[72] Wright, *NIB* (2002) 500.

people did not proceed from pedigree, circumcision or Torah-observance. Rather, God's people were defined by faith, and Abraham was the prototype, an uncircumcised pagan who believed God's promise. When he believed, God reckoned his faith as righteousness!

So, Paul concludes, because Abraham believed God had the power to do what he promised, his faith was reckoned as righteousness (4:22). Paul applies the expression "it was reckoned" directly to everyone who emulates Abraham's faith, and in particular, those who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead (4:23-24). The opening declaration, that God had declared with power that Jesus was his Son by resurrection (cf. 1:4), and that this good news is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes (cf. 1:16), has now been explained in detail. The true family of God consists of Abraham's children, those who believe that God has the power to do what he promised, and specifically, the power to raise Christ from the dead. Paul is uninterested in faith for faith's sake, as though religious faith in itself were sufficient. Rather, it is specifically Christian faith—the faith that God delivered over Jesus to death for our sins and raised him to life for our acquittal—this is the faith that saves (4:25)!The sacrificial nuance of the words "he was delivered over" (παραδίδωμι) is the same in the LXX of Isaiah 53:6, 12.

Paul's use of parallel language deserves special comment. He declares that Jesus was handed over "because of" (διὰ) our sins, and he was resurrected "because of" (διὰ) our acquittal. Just what does this mean? In Isaiah's suffering servant passage, the parallel phrase "because of" our sins is clearly intended to describe substitution (Is. 53:4-6). The Servant of the Lord took upon himself the infirmity, sorrow, affliction, piercing, crushing and punishment that should have been ours. He suffered in our place. He suffered what we deserved to suffer. The other half of Paul's description, he was raised "because of" our justification, is not as apparent. It is more usual in Paul for acquittal to be associated with Jesus' death (e.g., Ro. 5:9). Some have suggested that Paul's language may be related to the LXX of Isaiah 53:11, though this is not entirely clear.[73] In any case, Paul's language seems to closely connect Jesus' death and resurrection so that they are inseparable. There is a range of nuance in the preposition διὰ (accusative case), and both John Murray and F. F. Bruce may come most nearly to this nuance by saying that Jesus' resurrection "guarantees" our justification.[74] As such, Christ died to atone for our sins, and he was raised from the dead to seal our acquittal.

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[73] Here, the LXX says that after the Servant's suffering, he would see the light of life, implying resurrection, and this resurrection was intended "to justify the Just One who serves many" (δικαιῶσαι δίκαιον εὖ δουλεύοντα πολλοῖς). Still, this solution is not wholly satisfactory, since in the LXX the one who is vindicated is the Servant himself, while in Romans it is "the many" who are vindicated.

[74] J. Murray, *Epistle to the Romans [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 156; Bruce, p. 119.

Hopelessness, Hope, Victory and Glory (5:1 - 8:39)

Structure has occupied a considerable role in the interpretation of the Roman letter. Older exegetes, particularly Protestants, separated the sections of the letter by designating chapters 1-8 as doctrinal, and subdividing it with sections on justification and sanctification, chapters 9-11 as an appendix addressing the role of Israel, chapters 12-15 as Paul's ethical exhortations, and chapter 16 as the closing. In practice if not in theory, each of these sections could be addressed independently of the others. However, we already have seen that the Jewish/Gentile question looms large in the early chapters of the book, and it should not be divorced from what Paul will say in chapters 9-11. If 1:16-17 is Paul's thesis for the whole, then the readers should expect the whole letter to build from that premise. Further, while chapters 5-8 seem to have a style and a set of cohesive themes that distinguish them from chapters 1-4, the demarcation in terms of justification/sanctification seems a bit artificial and superimposed upon the text. For instance, the word group for sanctification (ἁγιάζω, ἁγιασμός) appears rarely (only three times in the entire letter). There also are considerations of style. While not abandoning entirely the diatribe style of chapters 1-4, Paul's language is much less combative in chapters 5-8. He no longer seems to be sparring with imaginary opponents so much as talking to friends within the Christian family. Also, the important theme of God's love is introduced, and it begins and concludes chapters 5-8 (Ro. 5:5, 8; 8:35, 39). Abraham disappears, and in his place one finds not only the original Adam but also the new Adam. Paul describes the challenge of Christian life, characterized by both fleshly weakness and the power of the Holy Spirit. In the end, he works toward the triumphant conclusion that for those who put their faith in Christ Jesus, future glorification is guaranteed.

In this treatment, then, we shall proceed upon the assumption that Paul's "structure" is developmental, that is, that the themes of chapters 5-8 grow out of the foundation he already has laid in chapters 1-4, and further, that the various sections of the letter cannot be isolated from each other. Additionally, we will attempt to allow the dominant themes to arise out of Paul's own language and thought rather than superimpose upon him the categories drawn from systematic theology.

Reconciled at Last (5:1-11)

Estrangement is an agonizing thing, and in the Jewish/Gentile world of the 1st century, it was a dominant reality both culturally and theologically. At a sociological level, Gentiles were estranged from Jews, and this estrangement was reinforced by notions of pedigree, circumcision and the Torah. In previous chapters, Paul faced this estrangement head on, showing that such alienation was inappropriate, because all people, both Jews and non-Jews, had terribly failed in their response to God—hence both were equally culpable—and also because in Abraham there was a prototype for

justification by faith apart from pedigree, circumcision and the works of the Torah. Even more devastating than social alienation, however, was the basic truth that the whole human race was alienated from its Creator. Paul's initial thesis was that in the gospel of Jesus Christ this alienation between humans and God had been resolved. In the gospel was to be found God's power for the salvation of everyone who believed, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (1:16). Now, Paul takes up the in greater detail this reconciling power of the gospel.

The antithesis of alienation is peace, and Paul's transitional word "therefore" (**οὖν**) marks out his intention to build on what he already has established. Since those who believe have been acquitted through faith, their state of alienation from God is now over. Peace has been established![75] Paul's language offers more than a hint of the cultural language of the Caesars, who declared the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) over a vast Mediterranean empire under the control of a single power. The Caesar was "lord" (**κύριος**) over all, and his birthday was celebrated as "gospel" (**εὐαγγέλιον**). Accolades to the emperor included phrases like "the grace (χάρις) of Caesar Augustus" and "the savior (σωτήρ) for the salvation (σωτηρία) of the entire human race". "Hope" (**ἐλπίς**) was held forth to the citizens who could expect a better life under the emperor's blessing.[76] Using this familiar language, Paul declares a new order in which lordship, gospel, grace, salvation, peace and hope are now given to all God's people through Jesus Christ!

It is especially noteworthy to observe the verbal tenses in the dense statements in 5:1, 9, since Paul describes both past, present and future realities. Paul says that "we have been justified" (aorist participle), "we have peace" (present indicative), and "we shall be saved" (future). The ground of salvation is something that lies in the past in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The blessing of salvation is the ongoing reality of peace with God. The hope or certainty of salvation is that in the end, God's divine wrath against sin will not be meted out against those who have put their trust in Christ.[77]

Also, Paul uses the metaphorical imagery of a temple (5:2). He speaks of "access" to a place where believers "now stand". Although he does not develop this thought to the extent of the writer of Hebrews (cf. He. 4:16; 10:19-22), the essential thought is the same. Believers in Christ now stand confidently in the holy place of

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[75] While theoretically the expression can be translated either as "we have peace with God" (indicative mood) or "let us have peace with God" (imperative mood), the former is to be preferred on the basis of the aorist tenses in 5:9-10 ("having been justified" and "we were reconciled"). Paul describes what has been done in Christ, and the result is ongoing peace with God ("we have peace", present indicative mood).

[76] J. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 168-171; A. Hanson, *The Pastoral Letters [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 186-188.

[77] A. Hunter, *The Gospel According to St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), pp. 14-57.

God's grace! The glory of God that hovered over the mercy seat is now their hope, for God restores to them the lost glory of his image they forfeited through sin (see comments at 3:23). Though they fell short of his glory (cf. 3:23), they now rejoice that it will be restored to them (cf. 8:18ff.). It is hard to believe that here Paul did not have in mind the great passages in Isaiah announcing that "the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it" (Is. 40:5) and "the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (Is. 60:1) and "your God will be your glory" (Is. 60:19). Drawing both from the Roman world and the Jewish world, Paul uses verbal images to communicate to his readers their new status in Christ Jesus.

This holy place of grace where believers now stand, paradoxically, is also a place of suffering. The role of tribulation (θλιψις), however, is not to be considered punishment or a sign of God's displeasure. (To the contrary, the sign of God's displeasure is to give someone over to the sinful desires of their hearts, cf. 1:24, 26, 28.) Instead, suffering performs a necessary role to develop within believers those graces toward which God has called them: perseverance, character and hope (5:3-4). The one leads to the other, and the ultimate goal is for believers to become like Jesus Christ, or as Paul says elsewhere, "to become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (Ep. 4:13). In the end, such hope in God will never let one down! The sign of this confidence is the outpouring of God's love in believers' hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit (5:5).[78] Suffering is not a sign of shame; rather, it points to God's process of development. Further, as an aside, Paul's assumption that all the believers in the Roman church were filled with the Spirit forbids bifurcating the church into the "haves" and the "have-nots" as in some forms of Pentecostalism. All believers have been given the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Co. 12:13).

All these marvelous blessings have come through the death of Jesus Christ. Rhetorically, Paul ends four Greek sentences in a row with a form of the verb "die".

> *Christ…on behalf of the ungodly, died!*
> *For hardly on behalf of a just man anyone will die!*
> *For on behalf of the good man perhaps someone even dares to die!*
> *But…Christ on behalf of us died!*

Even though humans were guilty (cf. 3:19), condemned (cf. 1:18) and without power to rectify their own situation (cf. 3:20), God acted in their behalf through the death of Jesus (5:6). The expression that Christ died "for" (ὑπὲρ) the ungodly again raises the image of sacrifice and substitution. This preposition, meaning "in behalf

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[78] The genitive "love of God" (ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ) can be translated as either subjective (the love God has for us) or objective (the love we have for God). Most translations take it in the former sense (so, NIV, NRSV, RSV, NEB, TEV, ESV, Moffat, Weymouth, Phillips), though some leave it ambiguous (KJV, NASB, ASV, NAB).

of", is a favorite of Paul's in describing the meaning of Jesus' death (cf. 8:32; 1 Co. 1:13; 5:7; 11:24; 15:3; 2 Co. 5:14-15, 21; Ga. 3:13; Ep. 5:2, 25; 1 Th. 5:10; 1 Ti. 2:6; Tit. 2:14). The substitutionary implications are unmistakable.[79] That Jesus' death was "according to time" (κατὰ καιρὸν) means that it was at the time when nothing else would help.

Normally, people do not die for others, though rare exceptions might be cited if someone was deemed particularly righteous or good (5:7). However, for someone to die in behalf of the ungodly, on the face of it, seemed beyond belief. God's divine love was beyond the wildest human imagination. It was radical, undeserved, and unfathomable! Nor was it that humans had sought God so as to stake a claim upon his love. Instead, Christ died for humans while they still were sinners—while they still were falling short of the mark (5:8)! The connection between God's love and Christ's death must not be missed. Christ's death was not merely an expression of his own love, as though it could be separated out from the love of God, but it was a demonstration of God's love! The notion sometimes expressed that a God of love would not send his own Son to die misses the mark entirely! This is precisely what God did!

Since this is the case—since now believers have been acquitted through the death (blood) of Jesus—they can confidently face the final judgment at the end (5:9; cf. 2:16). By using the word "blood" as a synecdoche for Jesus' death, Paul recalls the atonement passages from the Torah (cf. Ex. 30:10; Lv. 16:27; 17:11; Nu. 35:33) as well as the blood of the Passover, the means by which the ancient Israelites averted destruction (Ex. 12:13).[80] The "blood" of Jesus as a figure of speech describing his death should not be separated from the sacrifice of Jesus' whole person as though Paul only referred to the fluid in the heart and veins.[81] Salvation through Christ's blood is the New Testament parallel to the exemption from death at the first Passover. God's wrath, which will be poured out at the last day against sinners who have been storing up for themselves their just deserts (cf. 2:5), will be withheld from those justified through their faith in Christ's death. They will be saved from this wrath through Christ.[82]

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[79] D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), pp. 465-471.

[80] For a fuller discussion of "blood" as a synecdoche for death as opposed to a figure of speech for life, see L. Morris, pp. 112-128.

[81] In their devotional life, some Christians have focused upon the blood of Christ as almost an independent substance. This can hardly be correct. The parallel phrases "we were reconciled…through the death of his Son" (5:10) and "we have now been justified by his blood" (5:9) show clearly that the one is simply another way of speaking about the other. The fanciful notion that Jesus' blood was divine (derived from God, the Father) as opposed to human (derived from his mother) must be discarded.

[82] The use of this passage by dispensationalists to garner support for a pre-tribulation rapture position—that to be saved from God's wrath means Christians will be taken to heaven in order to be spared the messianic woes on earth prior to the end of the age—is hopelessly out of context. There is nothing in this passage to even remotely suggest

Paul here appeals to an *a fiortiori* argument, that is, if such-and-such is true, how much more is *this* true. If God did the unthinkable by allowing his Son to die in behalf of those who were his enemies, thus reconciling them to himself, it is even more certain that he intends to save those same individuals through the ongoing, resurrection life of Jesus (5:10)!

The language of reconciliation in the New Testament, including this passage, generally emphasizes that God takes the initiative. God is the subject of the verb, not the object. On this basis, some have suggested that only humans are reconciled, while God himself does change his disposition toward humans. This is the view of Protestant classical liberalism that says that God always maintains and always has maintained toward humans a disposition of acceptance. The problem with this viewpoint is that it leaves no room for God's wrath, and in fact, would say that God's love and God's wrath are essentially incompatible. Such a theological stance is fundamentally incompatible with St. Paul himself. Paul has no hesitation about speaking both of God's wrath and God's love in the same breath: *God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us*, and *having been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him [Christ]*. Leon Morris is quite correct, then, to say, "We maintain, therefore, that there is no good reason for rejecting the conclusion to which the biblical evidence points, namely, that reconciliation includes what we must call a change on the part of God as well as on the part of man, since the wrath of God is no longer directed towards man."[83]

As a final note, Paul asserts that this promise and hope will climax in triumph (5:11). He uses the word "boast" (**καυχάομαι**) as he did in 2:17, and the contrast is probably intentional.[84] In the former passage, it was the Jewish person boasting about a relationship with God based upon the possession of the Torah. Here, it is the Christian boasting about reconciliation with God through the Lord Jesus Christ! The one was pride of origin, pride of tradition, pride of religious practice—in short, pride of self. The other is pride wholly in God's gracious action in Christ Jesus by which one has become part of God's family—true reconciliation! Membership in the covenant community has been gained for all who believe by the redeeming, justifying, atoning, reconciling work of God's own Son! As Paul says more than once elsewhere, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Co. 1:31; 2 Co. 10:17; cf. Je. 9:23-24)!

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that Paul has in mind a great tribulation before the conclusion of history. Everything, to the contrary, is in the context of "the day of God's wrath" (2:6) and "the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ" (2:16).

[83] Morris, p. 249. (And see the larger surrounding discussion, pp. 214-250.)

[84] The NIV's rendering "we rejoice" is weak and misses this connection and contrast with 2:17.

From Adam to Jesus Christ our Lord (5:12-21)

In any reading of the Old Testament, the figure of Adam looms large, not so much because of the space devoted to him as to the fact that he is the first described human being. His very name, אָדָם (= the human, the earth creature, humanity, people), serves both as the proper noun for an individual as well as a collective designation for the whole race. The name Adam can serve to describe not only the male but also collectively to describe both male and female (Ge. 5:2). Jewish theology in the time of Paul[85] acknowledged that Adam was responsible for the first sin and that through this sin death became universal. Paul's theology about Adam in Romans 5 fits very well the general thought of his Jewish compatriots.

> *For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.* (Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24)

> *For what did it profit Adam that he lived nine hundred and thirty years and transgressed that which he was commanded? Therefore, the multitude of time that he lived did not profit him, but it brought death and cut off the years of those who were born from him.* (2 Baruch 17:2-3)

> *...Adam sinned and death was decreed against those who were to be born…* (2 Baruch 23:4)

> *...Adam sinned first and has brought death upon all who were not in his own time…* (2 Baruch 54:15)

> *And you laid upon him one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants.* (4 Ezra 3:7)

> *The first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus, the disease became permanent…* (4 Ezra 3:21)

> *For what good is it to all that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? O Adam, what have you done? for though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendents.* (4 Ezra 7:117-118)

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[85] The Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha probably dates to the late 1st century BC, while 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, Jewish literature in the Pseudepigrapha, both date to about AD 100.

Paul certainly understood Adam as the common ancestor of the whole race, both Jew and non-Jew.[86] Further, he agreed that it was through this one man's transgression that death came to all humans. By death Paul means not only physical death (though he certainly means this as well), but also spiritual estrangement from God. His coupling of the words death and condemnation demonstrates that he is thinking in larger scope than merely physics.

Paul connects Adam's sin with the death for all humans, and he also connects the sins of all individuals who descended from Adam with their consequent deaths. Like the unknown writer of 2 Baruch, Paul can equally say that through his sin Adam brought death upon all (see the above passages from Jewish literature), and at the same time, that each person has become his own Adam, and by sinning brought death upon himself.

> *Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us has become our own Adam.* (2 Baruch 54:19)

This paradoxical way of expressing things has garnered a tremendous amount of theological controversy. One extreme is represented by the 5th century British monk Pelagius (d. after 418), who argued that Adam's sin had no lasting consequences for the human race.[87] Protestant liberal theology has tended to follow the lead of Pelagius with its optimistic view of humankind. The polar opposite was Augustine (354-430), who taught that all humans sinned seminally in Adam, and therefore, all humans were guilty of Adam's sin, depraved and without redeeming merit.[88] Here, sin is genetically transferred at conception. Orthodoxy through the centuries has tended to follow the lead of Augustine, though in modern times there has been a de-emphasis in the attempt to trace this defect to genetics *per se*. Somewhere between these two extremes lies the belief, expressed by the neo-orthodox theologian Emil Brunner, that while sin is not a hereditary disease, it nevertheless is "a ruling, insuperable power from which the individual person, apart from Jesus Christ, seeks in vain to disentangle himself and which becomes sin in his own acting and willing." Brunner also can say, "Summing up, we can say this much: Since Adam this power of sin and death is in the world, and everyone is implicated in it by being a sinner himself."[89] Evangelicals have generally followed the Reformers

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[86] Of corollary interest, modern geneticists have begun exploring DNA sequencing and biological relationships between all people groups, and there is growing genetic evidence to support the common ancestry of all humans, cf. S. Olson, *Mapping Human History* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2002).

[87] B. Shelley, *EDT* (1984) 834.

[88] N. Geisler, *EDT* (1984) 106.

[89] E. Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans,* trans. H. Kennedy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 46.

Luther and Calvin in affirming that, since Adam's fall, the human will is in bondage and without the capability of enabling men and women to free themselves from their servitude to sin.[90]

Paul breaks off his sentence in 5:12 in order to offer some parenthetical explanations. He will not pick up the broken sentence structure again until 5:18. In the parenthesis, he addresses two issues, the first being the period between Adam and Moses, when the Torah was given (5:13-14). Before the giving of the Torah, humans still continued to fall short of the mark by sinning, and they suffered the consequence of death, as did Adam. Yet, how could sin be reckoned if there was no law? How could men and women even know what was sinful? In this case, Paul argues, sin was not counted against them with respect to the Torah, but death ruled this period nevertheless. To be sure, the sinners between Adam and Moses were not strictly on the same level as Adam. Adam had transgressed a specific commandment; those following Adam did not have the Torah, so their sins were not transgressions of specific commandments in the same way as was Adam's. Still, they were sinners, and they suffered the consequence of death. Those living between Adam and Moses were more-or-less the equivalent of non-Jews who lived after the time of Moses—living without the Torah, but nevertheless knowing enough about God to actively reject him (cf. 1:18-23). In this way, Adam prefigured Jesus in that both Adam and Jesus were given specific commands from God, and both, either by obedience or disobedience (cf. 5:14, 19), became the respective heads of a "race" who followed them.

Paul's second parenthetical explanation explains two inequities. First, while the transgression and the gift of salvation are set side by side for comparison, they are not simply equal and opposite. Rather, the gift of salvation carries far greater weight than Adam's transgression. Adam's one sin brought death to all humans, but God's grace through Christ not only reversed this sentence of death for Adam's single transgression, it reversed the sentence of death for the entire multitude of human transgressions that have been committed ever since (5:15)! It truly "overflowed" to the many! The second inequity is the difference between the negative results of Adam's disobedience and the positive results of Jesus' obedience. While they are comparable in that one action affected many, they are not balanced since they did not occur in similar circumstances. In the case of Adam, his one action in a circumstance of innocence led to the disaster of condemnation. In the case of Jesus, the other action in a circumstance when all men and women had sinned led to the blessing of acquittal (5:16). Though in one respect Adam and Christ can be compared side-by-side, there is an unlimited gulf between their circumstances and the results of their

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[90] D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), I.100.

actions. In the case of the former, death "ruled" over all. In the case of the latter, life "ruled," but only for those who would receive God's abundant grace and his gift of righteousness. For the former, the sentence for one man's sin was imposed on all without exception. For the latter, the blessing of one man is offered (but not imposed) on all who will receive it. The present active participle of the verb λαμβάνω (= to take hold of, to obtain, to receive) is important here, because it differentiates between what was imposed after Adam's sin and what must be grasped in light of Christ's obedience (5:17). The one consequence was without recourse; the blessing is available for all but not automatic for all. It must be received.

Finally, Paul is ready to resume what he began but interrupted in 5:12. Adam's faithless trespass resulted in the condemnation of all humans. By contrast, Jesus' faithful obedience to the Father resulted in acquittal and the blessing of life for all humans (5:18). By "one righteous act", Paul has in mind Jesus' acceptance of the cross (cf. Phil. 2:8). The fundamental difference was disobedience versus obedience. Adam disobeyed; Christ Jesus obeyed. Adam's obligation was minimal—only something he was to avoid. Jesus' obligation was comprehensive—the offering of his very life! The similarity in the comparison was the relationship between "the one" and "the many" (5:19). By "many" Paul means "all".[91] The "many" have been constituted righteous, that is, they have had righteousness imputed to them or have been put into the category of the righteous. Note that the verb καθίστημι (= to appoint, to become, to be made) appears twice in this passage, first when through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, and second when through the obedience of one man the many will be constituted righteous. Of course, recognition that "the many" means "all" raises the question of universalism, and in fact, Karl Barth was accused of this very thing after the publication of his commentary on Romans.[92] Still, Paul's earlier use of the expression "those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness" (5:17) should allay any suspicion that he intends universalism. Further, in view of Paul's concern all along for the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, his use of the term "the many" points to the solidarity of all humans, both Jew and non-Jew. Both were

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[91] While in some contexts "many" may stand in contrast to "all" (i.e., "many, but not all"), the Hebrew precedent *rabbim* can have the inclusive sense (i.e., "the whole, comprising many individuals) and probably does so here. This inclusive sense derives from the fact that Hebrew and Aramaic have no word for "all" in the sense of a sum (and *kol* means totality, but not the sum), cf. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. N. Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p.179. Some older Calvinistic commentators supposed that Paul used the word "many" in support of limited atonement (i.e., "many, but not all"), cf. R. Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans* (rpt. Mac Dill AFD, Florida: MacDonald, n.d.), p. 219. Rather, Paul contrasts the "many" with the "one", and "many" is an idiomatic way of saying "all".

[92] K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University, 1933). Barth denied this charge, but his theology remains somewhat ambiguous on the point, cf. D. Mueller, *Karl Barth [MMTM]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1972), pp. 152-154.

implicated in Adam's transgression, and both are beneficiaries of Christ's obedience. Hendriksen has it right when he says that here Paul "is combatting the ever-present tendency of Jews to regard themselves as being better than Gentiles."[93]

Now Paul explains the role of the Torah. If the controlling "heads" of the two spheres of disobedience/sin/death and obedience/righteousness/life are Adam and Jesus respectively, what is the role of the Torah? Why was it even introduced? Paul seems to have explained the whole history of the human race without it! In Judaism, by contrast, the role of the Torah was paramount, and it is not without reason that second temple Jews are called "people of the book". The whole period from the Maccabean revolt until the fall of Jerusalem is marked by a Jewish nationalism grounded in the Torah.[94] For Paul, the Torah did indeed have a role, but it was not the one popularly assumed by most Jews. Far from being the means by which Jews escaped the implications of Adam's sin, the Torah became the means by which their transgression was multiplied (5:20a; cf. 2:17ff.; 3:19-20). It was one thing to regard non-Jews as transgressors, but of course they did not have the Torah. It was quite another to realize that the Jews, also, were sinners, and in fact, that their sins were magnified precisely because they *did* have the Torah! The Torah did not have within itself the solution to the problem. Rather, the solution was in God's grace, for where sin was magnified by the giving of the Torah, God's grace was magnified even more (5:20b)! Transgression led to death, and Paul can personify sin/death as a dominating force or "reign" (5:21a). Against this realm of frustration and failure, God's kingdom of grace reigns through God's gift of righteousness so that its citizens might live forever through Jesus Christ (5:21b)! Grace/life also is personified, and grace triumphs over sin!

The New Status: "Under Grace" (6:1-14)

Paul has sharply delineated between Adam/sin/condemnation/death, on the one hand, and Christ/obedience/justification/life, on the other. It now remains for him to explain more directly where the Christian stands with respect to these two spheres. He does so in two sections (6:1, 15), each beginning with the query, "What therefore" (**τί οὖν**)? In the first, he asks the rhetorical question regarding what conclusion should be drawn from what he has just said about Adam and Christ. If God's divine grace had the power to overcome Adam's sin as well as the rebellion of Adam's descendents—if the offense of both the one and the many could be turned around by the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ—then might someone not simply conclude that sin was of no consequence (6:1)? Would it not be logical to say that if

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[93] W. Hendriksen, *Romans [NTC]* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 183.

[94] For a more comprehensive discussion of this point, see D. Russell, *Between the Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), pp. 42-57.

one continued a life of sin, God's grace would simply continue to cancel it? *May it never be!*, was Paul's expletive (6:2a)![95] Sin, however universal, was always an affront to God, and it must never be perceived as innocuous. More to the point, when Christ died for the sins of all, his solidarity with believers meant that when *he* died for sin, *they* died to sin (6:2b; cf. Ga. 2:20; Col. 3:3). This metaphor of dying toward sin asserts a fundamental change for believers, and it is certainly believers of whom Paul speaks, since he shifts to the second person "we". By saying "we died to sin" Paul means that believers have renounced their allegiance to their sinful lives. What was alien to Christ now should be alien to them. Believers now have a completely new status. Previously, they belonged to the sphere of Adam/sin/condemnation/death. Now, they belong to the sphere of Christ/obedience/justification/life. How could they be content to live in the old sphere from which they had been rescued (6:2c)? No longer should they live the old life inherited from Adam, but they now are to live the new life won for them by Christ Jesus. Paul's question, to borrow N. T. Wright's analogy, is like asking, "Shall we remain in France?", with the assumption that if one stays in France he will still be speaking French.[96] No! When one leaves France he must speak a new language!

The departure from the old sphere of Adam/sin/condemnation/death had been marked by Christian baptism, for there was an essential link between Christian baptism and the death of Jesus, the one symbolizing the other (6:3).[97] Just as Jesus died and entered the tomb, so Christians were baptized, and by being submerged in the water, symbolically entered Christ's burial chamber. Just as Jesus arose from the dead on Easter, Christians also should rise to life in the new sphere won for them by Jesus the Messiah. That Paul prefaces these statements with the introductory, "Don't you know…?" implies that he expected this aspect of Christian teaching about baptism to be part of the Roman Christians' standard working knowledge.

Three times Paul uses the preposition "into" (εἰς): we were baptized "into Christ" (6:3), we were baptized "into his death" (6:3), we were buried through baptism "into death" (6:4). This way of expressing it emphasizes the Christian's solidarity with Christ, and such solidarity includes a new life. To seek to live in the sphere of the old life would be a denial of the new life that Christ had established. Christ was the prototype of this new life, for he was resurrected "from the dead

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[95] The expression **μὴ γένοιτο** (= may it not be) was used in the ancient world as a strong negation (it appears some 20 times, for instance, in Epictetus), and Paul regularly uses it in this letter to negate rhetorical questions (cf. Ro. 3:6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11). In order to retain this nuance, translators have offered various dynamic equivalencies, such as, "God forbid" (KJV), "No, never" (Williams), "What a ghastly thought!" (Phillips), "Never!" (Moffat), "No, no!" (NEB), "Heaven forbid!" (TCNT).

[96] Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.537.

[97] It is not known whether Paul was familiar with the saying of Jesus in Luke's Gospel in which Jesus referred to his coming death as "a baptism to be baptized with" (Lk. 12:50), but he might well have.

[ones]".[98] The theology of the Pharisees anticipated a general resurrection of all the dead at the end of the age, but Christians taught that Jesus was raised "from among the dead ones," the resurrection of one man that was qualitatively the same as the resurrection on the last day but had happened earlier! He was raised "by the glory of the Father," an expression that links the resurrection of Jesus with the glorification associated with the final resurrection (cf. 5:2; 8:18).

Since[99] believers have solidarity with Christ in his death (6:5a),[100] they will certainly remain united with him in his resurrection life (6:5b). In resurrection life, Christ Jesus certainly was immune to sin, and so ought believers to be. Paul's point here is not so much a comment that believers will be raised at the last day (though this is surely true, also), but that believers must be in solidarity with Jesus' resurrection life, and therefore, they must leave their former lives of sinfulness. Christians—baptized, grown together with Christ and standing with him on resurrection ground—can hardly expect to continue living in sin! [101] Rather, as Paul put it, "our old man" (παλαιός ἡμῶν ἄνθροπος) was crucified with Christ. This rich symbolism, in which our solidarity with Adam was executed when Jesus died on the cross (cf. Ga. 2:20; Col. 3:3), means that our bond with Adam's sin/condemnation/death has been broken—more than that, it has been destroyed (6:6)![102] God's purpose in destroying our solidarity with Adam was so that "the body of sin might be destroyed", and by body Paul means not the physical body so much as the whole person that is entrapped in Adam's heritage of sin. Hence, believers are not longer enslaved to sin, and the person who has died in this way has been "justified from sin" (6:7). This perfect indicative passive verb strikes the reader as unusual, since so far Paul has reserved the verb "to justify" with reference to God's acquittal from judgment. Translators have offered various alternatives to the word "justify", such as, "freed" (NIV, KJV, RSV, NASB, TEV), "pronounced righteous and released" (TCNT), "absolved from the claims of" (Moffat, Weymouth), "immune to the power of" (Phillips), "finished with" (JB) and "no longer answerable to" (NEB). The nuance at one and the same time links freedom with the courtroom verdict of acquittal. For the person who has died with Christ, "the verdict of 'not guilty' has been pronounced, [and] the charge has been forever cancelled."[103]

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[98] The term "the dead" (νεκρῶν) is plural.

[99] The use of "if" with an indicative verb is not intended to express doubt but the reality of the assumption, and often can be translated as "since" (so Weymouth).

[100] Paul's use of the unusual word συμφυτος (= grown together), which the NIV renders as "united" and the KJV as "planted together", expresses solidarity in a particularly vivid way. It is like the union of two trunks, intertwined and inextricable.

[101] N. T. Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.539.

[102] The term καταργηθῇ means to be abolished, wiped out or nullified, *BAG* (1979), p. 417.

[103] Richard Weymoth's *New Testament in Modern Speech*, footnote loc. cit.

Since this is the case, those who "died with Christ" can be assured that they also "will live with him" (6:8). Contextually, as in 6:5, Paul here refers not so much to the final resurrection at the end of the age, but rather, to the new life of the one who has been baptized into Christ's death and has been raised with him to live in the sphere of his resurrection life. Resurrection is not merely a resuscitation, like the raising of Lazarus, but the beginning of a new existence in which the old solidarity with Adam/sin/condemnation/death has been broken forever. The resurrected Christ can never die again! Death has lost its power, and it can no longer "lord it over" the believer (6:9)![104] Jesus' death was "once" (ἐφαπαξ),[105] that is, by a single act it broke forever the believer's solidarity with sin (6:10). The development of medieval eucharistic theology, where the offering of the bread and wine was perceived to be a re-sacrifice of Christ, was surely in serious error. Since Christ's sacrificial death was "once, for all", the resurrection life in which he now lives is equally a new sphere where he "lives for God", implying that believers, who share his resurrection life, also should live for God. They should reckon that their death to the slavery of sin is as final as Jesus' death to his limited, earthly life, and by the same token, their new life through Christ is as powerful and real as his post-Easter life (6:11).

All these truths bring Paul to a clinching "therefore" (οὖν). If the original question was "shall we go on sinning" (6:1), the answer is a powerful "do not let sin reign" (6:12)! Again, as in 5:21 and 6:9, Paul resorts to the language of kingdoms and rulers. Formerly, when humans were in solidarity with Adam, they were enslaved in the kingdom of sin/condemnation/death. Sin was their ruler, lording it over them so that they were compelled by the desires of their mortal bodies. Now, they were set free from this tyranny by the death and resurrection of Christ. No longer were they compelled to submit to the lordship of sin and evil desire. In these verses Paul resorts to what was for him a characteristic literary form, the use of the indicative and the imperative. The verbal mood shifts from the one to the other. After a series of indicatives ("we died to sin", "we were baptized into his death", "our old self was crucified"), he now shifts to a series of imperatives ("count yourselves dead to sin", "do not let sin reign", "do not offer the parts of your body to sin").[106] The NIV's "instruments of wickedness" can be more literally rendered "weapons of unrighteousness", thus continuing the metaphor of kingdom warfare (6:13a). Much later, Paul will use the same word to urge Christians to arm themselves with the "armor of light". In other words, Christians must not allow their bodies to become

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[104] The thought behind the verb κυρειύει (= lord it over, rule over, be the lord of) connects with Paul's earlier use of the term "reign" (5:21), where sin once "reigned" but now grace "reigns".

[105] Paul here uses the same word that has such prominence in the Letter to the Hebrews, cf. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10.

[106] For a larger discussion on Paul's use of the indicative and the imperative moods, see R. Longnecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (1964 rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 170-180.

weapons for the wrong army. Instead, as those resurrected to a new sphere of existence, they should present themselves to God's service and their bodies as "weapons of righteousness" (6:13b). The war between the kingdom of sin/condemnation/death and the kingdom of obedience/justification/life goes on, but believers can now volunteer their services to the side of righteousness, whereas before they were compelled to serve in the army of sin.

In this entreaty toward serving God, Paul demonstrates that salvation is in two directions. Believers are saved "from" something, but they also are saved "to" something. They are saved "from" sin, condemnation and death, but they are saved "to" obedience, righteousness and life. Emancipation from the slavery of the kingdom of darkness must be balanced by a commitment to service in the kingdom of light. Salvation is not only an escape but also a calling (cf. Ep. 2:10; 2 Ti. 1:9).

Finally, Paul concludes this section by the triumphant, "Sin shall not lord it over you, for you are not under Torah but under grace" (6:14)! It has been some time since Paul has spoken of the Torah (cf. 5:20), but all along he has intended to connect life under the Torah and life under the slavery of sin/condemnation/death. The Torah belonged to the old sphere of existence where sin was lord. Even more to the point, Paul has argued that God gave the Torah so that "the trespass might increase" by a more thorough awareness of sinfulness (cf. 5:20). Elsewhere, Paul says the same sort of thing: "We were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed" (Ga. 3:23). Elsewhere, Paul's solution to this dilemma is also the same: "I died to the law so that I might live for God" (Ga. 2:19), and "You are not under law" (Ga. 5:18). To be "under grace" means to live in a new realm where the old regime of sin/condemnation/death has been deposed. The Torah, which brought the amplification of transgression, no longer is king.

The New Freedom: Emancipation from Sin's Slavery (6:15-23)

Paul now comes to his second "what therefore" (cf. 6:1). This time the issue likely is directed toward possible objections raised by the Jewish community, for to be outside the Torah was to be outside any moral controls. His question, "Shall we sin because we are not under Torah?" aims at answering this problem, and once more, his expletive, "May it never be!" is emphatic (6:15; cf. 6:1). To answer this objection, Paul expands the metaphor of enslavement to which he alluded earlier.

Slavery was a category well-known in the Greco-Roman world, and by the time of Paul about a third of the population in urban centers were slaves. While most of them entered slavery as prisoners or war, those kidnapped by pirates, or children born to women already enslaved, the slave population was bolstered also by self-sale into slavery, the sale of freeborn children, the raising of foundlings and debt-bondage. Many people sold themselves into slavery to pay debts, obtain special jobs,

achieve security or to escape poverty. In addition, civil servants sometimes were required to "sell" themselves as a form of "bonding insurance" to secure responsible positions in city governments.[107] Thus, when Paul speaks of "offering yourselves as slaves" he referred to a well-known practice.

When people offer themselves in slave service, they do so with the universal assumption of complete obedience to their masters (6:16a). Using this metaphor to describe moral life, Paul says that there are two kinds of slave-masters, one he labels sin/death and the other obedience/righteousness (6:16b). Believers at one time were the slaves of the former, but through the gospel—what Paul calls the "form of teaching to which you were entrusted"—they now obeyed a new master (6:17).[108] They had been emancipated from the slavery of sin, and now they had become slaves of righteousness (6:18). As slaves of righteousness, their commitment to Christ was out of heart-felt obedience.

Paul correctly sensed that the slavery metaphor had its limitations. Slavery to sin/death was not equal and opposite to slavery to obedience/righteousness, since the one was oppressive and the other liberating. Hence, with an implied apology, he says that he has put this in "human terms" in view of the weakness of human flesh (6:19a), by which he probably means the difficulty his readers might have in understanding his allusion to slavery. Formerly, his Christian readers had offered their bodies in slavery to uncleanness and "lawlessness to lawlessness" (τῇ ἀνομίᾳ εἰς τῆς ἀνομίαν), terms which would be heavy with implications for readers of the Torah. His language describes people totally out of control, violating every moral principle and rule. By contrast, they now offered themselves as voluntary slaves to lives of righteousness leading to sanctification (6:19b). His language of "righteousness unto sanctification" assumes a process (contrary to the notion of instantaneous sanctification). When enslaved to sin, they were "free" from righteousness (6:20), but the outcomes were terrible, behaviors of shame leading to death (6:21). Now they were set free from this terrible slave-master, so they could become slaves to God. Here, the "fruit" (καρπος) of their new position was "to sanctification", and in the end, eternal life (6:22)! Again, just as the words "uncleanness" and "lawlessness" would be important in a negative way for Torah readers, so the word "sanctification/holiness" (ἁγιασμός), which Paul has used twice (cf. 6:19, 22), would be important in a positive way. Holiness was that toward which the Torah called its readers, and Paul now asserts that this goal of holiness

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[107] S. Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," *ABD* (1992) 6.66-68.

[108] By the phrase "form of teaching" some have suggested Paul here intends an early form of baptismal catechism, perhaps something along the lines of the confessions in Ro. 10:9, Phil. 2:5-11 or 1 Ti. 3:16. Such early Christian "hymns" might well have been used for catechesis, and certainly such passages became important in the later church as baptismal confessions, but there is not enough context to be certain of such a usage at this early period.

really comes through Christ Jesus in the new kingdom "under grace".

At last, then, Paul is able to summarize the great contrast between the two unequal slaveries. The one paid earned wages of death, the other offered an unearned gift of eternal life, and this gift came through Jesus Christ our Lord (6:23)! This new status of obedience/righteousness/life embraced both the indicative mood (what God had done) and the imperative mood (how we should respond). In the end, emancipation was not the liberty to do what one wanted but the freedom to do what one should. Justification was by grace alone, through faith alone. Still, as Wright cogently stated, grace was transformative! "God accepts us where we are, but God does not intend to leave us where we are."[109]

The Analogy of the Marriage Covenant (7:1-6)

All along, Paul has been concerned with the role of the Torah. For his Jewish Christian readers in Rome, even though he had never met them, Paul knew this issue was critical. Several times he has anticipated what he now intends to describe in detail:[110]

> *Circumcision has value if you observe the Torah, but if you break the Torah, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.* (2:25)

> *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the Torah; rather, through the Torah we become conscious of sin.* (3:20)

> *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the Torah.* (3:28)

> *Do we nullify the Torah through this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the Torah.* (3:31)

> *For if those who live by the Torah are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because Torah brings wrath. And where there is no Torah there is no transgression.* (4:14-15)

> *But sin is not taken into account when there is no Torah. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses…* (5:13b-14a)

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[109] Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.548.

[110] While the NIV does not use the word "Torah", I have used it here instead of the word "law" to emphasize Paul's frame of reference. Paul is not concerned with law in general; rather, he is concerned with the Jewish Torah in particular.

> *The Torah was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.* (5:20)
>
> *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under the Torah, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the Torah but under grace? By no means!* (6:14-15)

The role of the Torah was a sticky issue in the early church. Even though the Jerusalem council had delivered an encyclical to the Gentile churches that they were not obligated to the Torah, at least in the Jewish sense (though they needed to be sensitive to some Jewish and moral issues), and though that decision had been passed down in writing to the churches (Ac. 15:22-31; 16:4-5), there still remained considerable debate. By the time Paul returned to Jerusalem after his third missions tour (shortly after the writing of the Roman letter), he was confronted with the rumor that in his ministry he taught that even Jews were to "turn away from Moses" (Ac. 21:20-21). The leaders in the Jerusalem church were confident that such rumors were not accurate (Ac. 21:22-25), but if the rumor had reached Jerusalem, it might well have reached Rome. Hence, if Paul intended to pass through Rome and garner support for a mission further to the west, it behooved him to set forth his understanding of the Torah's role. This subject looms large throughout the Roman letter.

Paul begins with an analogy from the Old Testament instruction about marriage, death and remarriage (cf. Ge. 2:21-24; Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18; 24:1-4; Mal. 2:13-16). What Paul offers is a generally agreed upon summary of the law's intent, and it is clear that he is speaking of Jewish law, since he frames it from the standpoint of the woman, for whom under Jewish law there was no right of divorce.[111] While the inequity of the system is apparent in that the husband had the right of divorce but the woman did not, Paul does not comment on this inequity. It is the analogy itself that is important. Paul could assume his readers were knowledgeable about these laws, some because they were Jewish themselves and others because they had been God-fearers or proselytes before their conversion to Christianity (7:1a). The basic premise was that the bond of marriage was effective, as the more modern marriage liturgy says, "until death do us part" (7:1b-3). If one spouse died, however, the remaining partner was released from the marriage covenant and was free to marry again.

By analogy, believers also had died through their solidarity with the death of Jesus, a death symbolized by Christian baptism (cf. 6:3-7). Not only were believers "dead to sin" (cf. 6:11), they also "died to the law" (7:4a). Like a wife whose

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[111] R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) II.343-36.

previous marriage covenant was dissolved by the death of her husband, they now were free to enter into a new marriage covenant. The idea of a new covenant (with echoes of Jeremiah 31:31-34) meant that the new "spouse" was Jesus Christ, the one raised from the dead (7:4b; cf. 2 Co. 11:2). A new marriage meant the possibility of more children, and believers united with Christ could now "bear fruit to God", a metaphor suggesting virtue and good works (cf. Ga. 5:22-23; Ep. 2:10). The former marriage to the Torah was characterized by moral weakness,[112] where sinful desires were exacerbated by the law, and there was no recourse for help (7:5a; cf. 3:20b; 5:20a). The offspring of that marriage consisted of "bearing fruit to death", by which Paul means the condemnation of Adam and all his descendents, including those who received the Torah. Now, however, that marriage covenant had ended with the death of a spouse, so that in a new marriage covenant believers could serve "in the newness of Spirit" rather than "the oldness of letter" (7:6). By "letter" (γράμματος) Paul means specifically the Torah (cf. 2:27), and by Spirit he means the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is precisely the vision of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who speak of the new covenant as written "on their hearts" (Je. 31:33), an "everlasting covenant" and a "covenant of peace" (Eze. 16:60; 34:25; 37:26-27). In this new covenant, God would give the people a "new heart" and put within them his own Spirit (Eze. 36:24-27). This new covenant would "not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers" (Je. 31:32a). Elsewhere, Paul expands on this contrast by speaking of the new covenant as "not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Co. 3:6).

The Good Purpose of the Torah (7:7-13)

Having described the Torah as a dead spouse to which the believer is no longer obligated, Paul now is at pains to demonstrate that the Torah still performed a good function. In spite of all that Paul has said about the Torah's inability to establish righteousness, it still was given by the covenant God, and therefore, it did what God intended, even though the divine purpose for the Torah was limited in scope. In no way was the Torah to be equated with sin, even though it was linked with sin in the sense that it magnified sin (7:7a; cf. 3:20b; 5:20a). Rather, the Torah defined sin, not merely in external and observable transgressions but also in internal failures, such as

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[112] Literally, Paul says they were "in the flesh". Paul's understanding of flesh (σαρξ) derives from the Hebrew tradition, where human flesh is characterized as transitory, mortal and finite, cf. H. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), pp. 26-31. Morally, the flesh is neutral, but practically it is powerless and limited, hence, weak. The flesh is the human self in all its powerlessness and limitation. It has no power to do good, and in fleshly weakness, humans cannot please God. Translators have struggled to find an appropriate dynamic equivalency, such as "natural self" (Knox), "earthly nature" (TCNT) and "human nature" (TEV). The NIV's rendering as "sinful nature", however, may be an over-translation, cf. L. Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 105-106.

coveting, the failures that only God could observe (7:7b).[113] Sin was like an alien attacker. It seized the moment when transgression was clearly defined by the Torah, inciting repeated violations. Paul's personification of sin recalls the early reference in the Cain and Abel narrative, where God warned Cain that sin was "crouching at your door" (Ge. 4:7). While the Torah was not the cause of sin, it became the means though which sin gained even greater ascendancy over men and women (7:8a), or as Paul says earlier, "sin reigned" (cf. 5:21). Without the Torah, sin had limited power, because transgression was left undefined (7:8b).

Of course, even before the giving of the Torah, sin was in the world as a general expression of human rebellion (cf. 5:13), but when the Torah was given, sin increased exponentially. When Paul says that he was "alive" apart from law (identifying himself with those who lived before the giving of the Torah as well as with the non-Jews who did not have the Torah in the first place), he means that without the commandments of the Torah, sin remained undefined, and in fact, was not "counted against him" but was left "unpunished" (7:9a; cf. 3:25b; 5:13b). The giving of the Torah changed everything, for it provided the means for greater condemnation (7:9b), or as Paul says earlier, "the Torah was added so that the trespass might increase" (cf. 5:20a). The Torah, which was presented with the admonition "choose life, so that you and your children may live" (cf. Dt. 4:1, 40; 5:16, 33; 6:1-2; 8:1, 3; 11:8-9; 25:15; 30:6, 15-16, 19), actually resulted in added condemnation, bringing death to individuals and to the nation (7:10; cf. Eze. 18)! Sin took advantage of the Torah, tricked Paul into disobedience, and put him to death (7:11). Paul's use of the word "deceive" (ἐξαπατάω) shows that he has in mind a parallel with the temptation in Genesis 3, where the snake deceived the woman. Just as the snake distorted the commandment of God in order to trick Eve, so also sin used the Torah to deceive those who received it. Death followed for Eve, and death also followed for everyone who violated the Torah: "The soul who sins will surely die" (Eze. 18:20)!

The fact that sin, personified as a usurper, took advantage of the giving of the Torah in no way disparaged the Torah itself. To the contrary, the Torah was "holy, righteous and good" (7:12). Torah was cleared of any complicity with sin, even though it became the means by which sin gained ascendancy. The covenant God, the author of the Torah, was in no way the author of sin! As Paul has asserted earlier, the message of faith does not nullify the Torah but upholds it (c f. 3:31)!

Verse 13 is a transition, bridging what has preceded and what will follow. To the question of whether the Torah, even though it was good, was an instrument of

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[113] The tenth commandment, unlike the previous nine, is concerned with motivation as opposed to simply an act, cf. P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 163-164.

death, Paul answers a firm "no".[114] The Torah was in no way the cause of death, even though sin took advantage of the Torah's commandments. Sin itself was the cause of death. However, the infection of sin was so pervasive in the human race, and as Paul argued earlier, it was so pervasive among both non-Jews and Jews, that no issuance of laws could defeat it. Hence, the Torah could not have been given as the final solution to sin and death. Instead, the Torah defined sin so that it could be clearly seen, and this role was necessary, even though sin was magnified in the process.

The Human Struggle with Sin (7:14-25)

Considerable debate has accompanied the interpretation of this section, since there is a shift in verbal tense from the past tense (largely aorist) to the present. On the one hand, some see this tense shift as demarcating the difference between the unregenerate Paul and the regenerate Paul, and by extension, the unregenerate state and the regenerate state of all believers. If so, then 7:14-25 describes the believer's struggle with sin, and this interpretation has been generally followed in the tradition of Augustine, Calvin, Reformed Theology and many evangelicals. Here, the Christian lives in two worlds, temporarily in the present but at the same time participating in the inauguration of a new age. The struggle for believers, then, is between the weakness of the flesh and the power of the Spirit. Others argue that descriptions like "sold as a slave to sin" (7:14b) and "a prisoner of the law of sin" (7:23b) seem to fly in the face of Paul's earlier statements that "sin shall not be your master" (6:14), that "you used to be slaves to sin" (6:17, 20), that "you have been set free from sin", and that believers now exist in a sphere where "the gift of righteousness reigns" (5:17, 21). Here, interpreters hold that the discussion in 7:14-25 continues the description of the unregenerate person, and the shift in tense is inconsequential. This interpretation has been adopted by many since the early church and up into the middle ages, and it generally has been followed by the Greek fathers as well as modern Arminian Christians.[115] Still others hold a variation of this latter position. They argued that 7:14-25 does indeed describe a Christian who struggles with sin, but that this struggle describes a substandard Christian who is living below his privilege. While Paul has argued for the new status of believers who are "under grace" (6:14), who have been "set free from sin" and who have become "slaves to righteousness" (6:18), he also urges Christians not to let "sin reign" (6:12-13), an admonition that carries little weight if it were beyond possibility. Paul is frank that his readers still live with "the weakness of the flesh" (6:19). Further, in 7:14-25 he

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[114] See footnote 95.

[115] Modern interpreters, also, are divided along these same lines. Commentators who follow the regenerate position include F. F. Bruce, John Murray and James Dunn, while those following the unregenerate position include W. G. Kummel, H. R. Ridderbos and N. T. Wright, cf. W. Hendriksen, pp. 225-230.

uses descriptions that seem ill-fitted for the unregenerate, such as, hating sin (7:15), wanting to do good (719, 21), delighting in God's law (7:22), regretting sin (7:15, 18-24), and thanking God for deliverance (7:25). Later, Paul will enlarge upon this struggle by urging his readers to set their minds on the Spirit rather than the flesh (cf. 8:5-8, 12-14).

It may be that all three of these approaches are more narrow than Paul's intent. It seems feasible that Paul was not here speaking of believers per se or unbelievers per se, but rather, of humans in all their weakness. Humans, who live in the flesh, are weak and susceptible to the power of sin. Unbelievers have no recourse at all, and believers, if they lapse into self-dependency, also fall prey to the power of sin. This makes sense of Paul's final cry of desperation, "I am a human, wretched" (7:24)!

How does all this fit with Paul's larger discussion of the Torah? Precisely in this: the Torah still fulfills its basic task of defining sin, and this role is important for all people, not merely Jews. Repeatedly, for instance, Paul appeals to the Torah in giving moral advice to believers (e.g., 13:8-10; 1 Co. 9:8-10; 14:21, 34; Ga. 5:13-15; 1 Ti. 1:8). Paul was no Marcionite! However, he also knew that the Torah in itself could never produce the righteousness God desired; Christ, alone, could do that!

Hence, Paul describes frankly the human struggle with sin in the context of the Torah that defines sin. The Torah was spiritual (7:14a), but in his flesh (σάρκινός = fleshly)—in his own arena of weakness—Paul was sold under sin (7:14b). The critical point, of course, is that the entire succeeding discussion describes a person who lives a "fleshly" life, that is, he continues to rely upon his own power to overcome sin. It was almost impossible to come to terms with the existential turmoil of such a state, for Paul found that there was an irreconcilable tension between what he wanted and what he hated (7:15). The Torah continued to perform its good function of defining sin (7:16), but sin was given a foothold, overpowering him as he depended upon his own fleshly resources (7:17). In his flesh—his sphere of human weakness—nothing existed that could contend with the power of sin (7:18a). Good intentions did not have the strength to prevail (7:18b-19). The desire to do God's will succumbed to the power of sin (7:20).

In the end, Paul discovered that in spite of the Torah[116] and its definition of sin, the power of evil could not be suppressed by the Torah in the context of human weakness (7:21). The Torah was like a schizophrenic child. On the one hand, it created delight in its call for righteousness (7:22), but on the other, it became a

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[116] Paul's use of the expression "the Torah" (**τὸν νόμον**) with the definite article shows he still has in mind the law of Moses. The NIV's omission of the definite article obscures this and implies that Paul may mean something like, "I find this principle (law)", especially when the NIV translators add the words "at work", which has no precedence in the Greek text. To the contrary, Paul is not speaking of some general principle. He still refers, as he has done all along, to the Torah, cf. Dunn, pp. 392-393.

"different Torah"—or a Torah with a dark side—which fought against the call to righteousness. This "different Torah" was in fact the same Torah, but the Torah experienced very differently. Here, the Torah had become the instrument of sin, enslaving Paul because of his fleshly weakness (7:23). In the end, the attempt to live in the arena of the flesh—the sphere of human weakness—resulted in a misery so acute that he could only cry out in desperation, "I [am] a human—wretched" (7:24a)! "Who will deliver me from the body of this death" (7:24b)?

At last there is a resounding jubilation of relief: *Thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (7:25a)! Only God through Christ Jesus can deliver someone from the desperate quandary of human weakness pitted against the usurping power of sin. Even though the Torah was good—and even though it continued to perform a valid function—it could never do what God had done in Jesus Christ! Humans could attempt to serve the Torah of God by the power of their minds, something that conventional Jewish thinking believed was possible. Those Jews, especially the ones inclined to interpret Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy, argued quite vehemently that the Torah empowered the mind to keep God's laws. The writer of 4 Maccabees, which was written not long before the time of St. Paul (ca. AD 20-54), expresses this very clearly: *In fact, since the law has told us not to covet, I could prove to you all the more that reason is able to control desires. To the mind he gave the law; and one who lives subject to this will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good, and courageous.* (4 Maccabees 2:6, 23). If Paul did not have this very text in mind, he certainly seems to have had the same thought in mind when he wrote, "I myself on the one hand serve the Torah of God with the mind, but on the other hand the Torah of sin with the flesh" (my translation). The mind, while it desired to do what was good, fell prey to fleshly weakness (7:25b).

Hence, every Christians live in two worlds, between the "already" and the "not yet." The eschatological tension set up by Jesus' life, death and resurrection places believers both in the present and the future. The kingdom of God has been inaugurated, but it has yet to reach its consummation.[117] In the meantime, believers struggle with sin. They have been set free so that they no longer are compelled to serve sin as their master, but they retain the weakness of the flesh, and if they rely upon this sphere of weakness, they will succumb to the power of sin.

The Torah of the Spirit (8:1-11)

Paul has set up a sharp polarity with respect to how Christians experience the Torah. On the one hand, the Torah is "good" and "spiritual" (cf. 7:13, 14), defining

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[117] For a full development of this concept, see G. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdamns, 1974).

sin and issuing a call to righteousness. The believer responds to this good quality by delighting in the high calling of the Torah (7:22). At the same time, there is a darker side to the Torah, or as Paul expresses it, a "different Torah." Sin operates within this darker side, taking advantage of human, fleshly weakness. So long as believers depend upon their own resources, they succumb to the "Torah of sin at work within [their] members" (7:23). There is no deliverance from this existential tension except in Christ Jesus (7:25a). The Torah, in spite of its spiritual role in defining sin, could not bridge the gap between the mind's intent to do good and the flesh's weakness and susceptibility to fall short (7:25b).

Was there a solution? Absolutely, yes! Paul's explosion of triumph asserts that "now" there is freedom from the condemnation of falling short (8:1) as well as empowerment through the Spirit to follow the righteous call of the Torah (8:4). The critical phrase, of course, is the identification of "those who are in Christ Jesus." Since the bond with Adam and the old sphere has been broken, Christians now exist "in Christ Jesus" as members of a new humanity, a new order, and a new kingdom. Here, as he said earlier, "grace reigns" (cf. 5:21). Their solidarity with Christ means that they are now "under grace" (cf. 6:14). The reason they are free from condemnation is because in this new sphere they now are empowered by the "Torah of the Spirit of life", which liberates them from the dark and ineffective side of Torah (8:2). The justice on the dark side of Torah was retributive rather than forgiving, and it was powerless to enable those under it to measure up to its demands. Once again, Paul almost certainly has in mind the new covenant theology of Ezekiel, where God promised to endow his people with his Spirit. By the Spirit he would move them to follow his decrees and to carefully keep his laws (Eze. 36:27). Jeremiah, similarly, is very clear that the central feature of the new covenant is forgiveness, not retribution (Je. 31:34b). The work of the Spirit does, in fact, bridge the gap between the good intentions of the mind and the weakness of the flesh. It sets the believer free from what Paul calls "the Torah of sin" (7:25b) or "the Torah of sin and death" (8:2).

The Torah in and of itself was not capable of bridging this gap, since it could only make demands, and in view of their fleshly weakness, humans could not live up to these demands (8:3a). But what the Torah could not do, God did through the messiah, both in his person and in the gift of the messianic Spirit. In the incarnation of Christ, God sent his own Son "concerning sin" (περὶ ἁμαρτίας). The NIV (so also NEB, NASB, NAB, TCNT) translates the phrase "concerning sin" in the sense of an atonement offering (8:3b), since this same wording carries that technical nuance in the Septuagint, where it regularly translates the Hebrew חַטָּאת (= sin offering).[118] The judgment that was upon humans for their sins was fully meted out in the death of

[118] Dunn, p. 422.

Jesus, and in his death, God "condemned sin in the flesh", that is, he dealt with sin in the flesh of Jesus (8:3c). Paul is careful to describe the incarnation by the term "likeness (ὁμοιώματι) of sinful flesh", thereby emphasizing that while Jesus was truly human, he also was sinless. Sin, the alien parasite that had invaded the human race, was decisively condemned in the death of Jesus, because sin found it impossible to gain a foothold in the life of God's Son as it had done in the lives of all other humans. Christ, the messiah, was the true representative of Israel, indeed of the whole human race, and as a sinless sin offering, he could die vicariously for them all while not participating in their sinfulness. In the end, the righteous demands of the Torah really could be satisfied by those who live their lives[119] in full dependence upon the messianic Spirit rather than the weakness of the flesh (8:4). Later, Paul will say that the outflow of Christian love *is* the fulfillment of what the Torah requires (cf. 13:10). Paul is implicitly Trinitarian at this point as he describes *God* sending his *Son* so that believers could live according to the *Spirit*.

Paul contrasts the life lived in dependence upon the flesh with the life lived in dependence upon the Spirit (8:5). Earlier, he described the existential tension between the mind and the flesh, a tension that simply could not be resolved by the Torah (cf. 7:21-25). Because of the Torah of the Spirit, however, the Christian is not obliged to live in this existential tension which ends in failure. Instead, he can live "according to the Spirit". If he sets his mind "according to the flesh", he will succumb to that sphere of human weakness that is so susceptible to the parasite of sin, but if he sets his mind "according to the Spirit", he will conduct himself in a way that fulfills the righteous call of the Torah, or as Paul has just said, "the righteousness of the Torah may be fulfilled in us who live…according to the Spirit".[120] The mindset of dependence on the flesh (lit., "mind of the flesh") leads to death. This is the old way of Adam/sin/condemnation/death. The mindset of dependence on the Spirit (lit., "the mind of the Spirit"), on the other hand, leads to life and peace (8:6). This is the new way of Christ/obedience/righteousness/life. The mindset of dependence on the flesh puts one at cross purposes with God, because the person who lives in this way cannot fulfill the holy calling of the Torah (8:7), and those who live "in the flesh" cannot please God (8:8).

Clearly, Paul understands his Christian readers, even though he has never met them, to be people "in Spirit" not "in flesh", and he can confidently say so because as believers they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (8:9a). Paul knows nothing of the

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[119] Paul uses the word "walk", which probably is a deliberate use of the traditional Jewish language of *halakah* (= to walk), the term used to describe one's behavioral responsibility to the Torah

[120] Literally, the Greek text reads: *For the [ones] being according to flesh mind the [things] of the flesh, but the [ones] according to Spirit the [things] of the Spirit."*

bifurcation of Christians into "the haves" and "the have nots".[121] If one is a believer, he/she is indwelt by the Spirit, and in fact, the inverse is true as well: anyone who is not indwelt by the Spirit by definition cannot be considered as belonging to Christ (8:9b). If a person is indwelt by Christ (and for Paul, "the Lord is the Spirit", cf. 2 Co.3:17), he will live even though he will die, just as Jesus said to Martha (8:10; cf. Jn. 11:25). Even though the body, what earlier Paul called the "body of sin" or the "body of death" (cf. 6:6; 7:24), still is subject to death because of sin (cf. 5:12), at the same time, "the Spirit is life", because believers now live in righteousness, thus fulfilling the righteousness of the Torah.[122] More to the point, since believers are indwelt by God's Spirit who raised Christ from the dead, resurrection at the end is assured for them, too (8:11).

Our Assurance Through the Spirit's Testimony (8:12-27)

If Paul's frank description of the tension between fleshly, human weakness and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit resulted in any tendency toward despair on the part of his readers, here he seeks to lay that fear to rest once for all! Yes, Christians owe something (lit., "we are debtors"), implying as he will state more specifically later, that they owe a debt of love and gratitude in view of God's overwhelming mercy (8:12a; cf. 13:8). However, they do not owe any service to live in the weakness of the flesh (8:12b). To live in dependence upon fleshly weakness was to live in the sphere of Adam/death (8:13a). To live in the sphere of Christ/life was to live so that through the inward help of the Spirit they killed their sinful behaviors (8:13b).

Those who live by the leading of the Holy Spirit are the ones who are truly "sons of God" (8:14), not those who lapse into a spirit of enslaving fear (8:15a). Believers have received the "Spirit of sonship"[123] by which they can address God by the familial title *Abba*. Such a description would be especially poignant for both Jews and Gentiles. Normally, the Jewish community considered itself to be God's sons by virtue of their Israelite heritage (cf. Ex. 4:22-23). Here, by contrast, Paul says sonship

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[121] The conditional **εἴπερ** (= if indeed, since) denotes a necessary condition given what Paul has just said, but it is not necessarily intended to suggest doubt.

[122] While the NIV translates **τὸ πνεῦμα** as "your spirit", meaning the human spirit, this rendering is highly unlikely. All along, Paul's contrast has been between the flesh, the arena of human weakness, and the Spirit, the sphere of God's power. For him to change this sequence in midstream seems unwarranted, and in any case, the possessive "your" simply does not exist in the original text. For a fuller discussion of this point, see G. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Pauline Letters* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1994), pp. 550-551.

[123] The term **υἱοθεσία** (= adoption) refers to conferred sonship in which the motive and initiative of adoption always lay with the adoptive father. In Roman culture, sometimes such adoptions consisted of the emancipation of slaves upon whom were then conferred the status of sons, and if this is what Paul has in mind here, the logic follows. The believer has been liberated from his status as "a slave to fear" and brought into God's intimate family as a son, cf. T. Rees, *ISBE* (1979) 1.54.

is demonstrated not by pedigree but by a life led by the Holy Spirit. By using the Aramaic word *Abba*, the child's word for father which continued to be used in adult life as a title of respect within families, Paul clearly assumes his readers' knowledge of the life of Jesus, for this is the title Jesus used to address God (cf. Mk. 14:36), and its use by Christians is a deliberate echo of Jesus' prayers.[124] This perception of God as our *Abba*—this instinctive cry of profound relationship—is prompted by the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Ga. 4:6). It is the inner testimony of the Spirit that we truly belong to God's family (8:16). Because we are true children, we are the rightful heirs of God's promises, indeed co-heirs with Jesus Christ (8:17a). By using the term heirs, Paul deliberately harks back to the promise God gave to Abraham, that in his posterity all the families of the earth would be blessed, what earlier Paul called the promise of being "heir of the world" (cf. Ro. 4:13). If Christ, the messiah, was Lord of the whole earth, his children also were destined to share in that rule, though as Paul is quick to point out, they share first in his suffering before they share in his glory (8:17b; cf. 5:3-5).

Still, however difficult any present sufferings might be, they are only light compared with the eventual glory that God will give (8:18; cf. 2 Co. 4:17). The expression "to be revealed in us" suggests that this glory is more than the privilege of seeing some celestial splendor, as from the standpoint of an observer, but actually consists of something that happens to the believer himself. In the meantime, the entire created order awaits this day of the triumph of God's children (8:19). This means that the ultimate purpose of God is sharply focused on humans themselves, and the created order is merely the context in which God's great plan for humans will be worked out. Indeed, the deterioration of the created order was through no fault of its own, but this decay was God's judgment on the universe because of human rebellion (8:20; cf. Ge. 3:17ff). In the end, however, Paul personifies the creation itself as expectant with hope for its emancipation from its slavery to decay. The hope of all creation centers upon this final victory of God's children, for they are what everything is about! When God's children are given their complete freedom, the universe also will be released from its trial of deterioration (8:21). Since Adam's fall, the creation has been like a mother in child-birth, waiting for the time of delivery (8:22). Believers, also, experience this same travail, since even though they have the gift of the Spirit, they still exist in bodies that are subject to death (8:23a). They have "the first-fruits of the Spirit," the initial blessing which is the indwelling and empowering of the Spirit so that they can fulfill the righteous call of the Torah (cf.

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[124] Jeremias can assert that this title is the single most important linguistic innovation on the part of Jesus. Such a direct address to God in this way was unknown in Judaism, cf. J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribners, 1971), pp. 36, 61-68.

8:4),[125] but still they face the tragedy of their own mortality as they await their final adoption (8:23b). Paul uses the imagery of adoption in the context of the already/not yet. Already believers are the adopted sons of God as verified by the gift of the Spirit (cf. 8:15). What still remains is for them to become the adopted sons of God by the redemption of their bodies, that final triumph when death itself is vanquished (cf.1 Co. 15:50-57; 2 Co. 5:1-5).

In the meantime, believers rest their salvation in the certainty of this future hope (8:24a). Hope (ἐλπὶς) is not a wistful ambiguity, but an expected certainty.[126] The object of this hope is not yet visible (8:24b; cf. 2 Co. 4:18), but its certainty is not in doubt. Rather, believers are patient as they await God's timing (8:25; cf. Phil. 3:13-14). In the meantime, believers join the whole universe in the groans of approaching child-birth. As mortal humans, they still are creatures of frailty, but the gift of the Holy Spirit makes up for their weakness (8:26a). The Spirit—the Comforter—comes alongside them in their weakness, helping them to pray in harmony with God's sovereign will. Indeed, in many situations believers do not even know how they should pray or what they should say, but the indwelling Spirit prays through them. This idea of the Spirit interceding through God's people was first envisioned by Zechariah, who anticipated the messianic outpouring of the "Spirit of grace and supplication" (Zec. 12:10). These inner urgings of the Spirit toward intercession are expressed in "speechless groanings" (στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις), by which Paul probably means "a mixture of longing and lament" (8:26b).[127] It seems unlikely that by this phrase Paul intends the gift of tongues, since "speechless groaning" seems more descriptive of inarticulate moans rather than any clear pattern of speech. The RSV's "sighs too deep for words" admirably captures the idea. The interaction between God and the indwelling Spirit leads to perfect unity. God, the heart-searcher (cf. Ps. 139:23; Je. 17:10), intimately knows the intent of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and when the Spirit intercedes through Christians in these moments of subjective groans, he does so in complete harmony with God's will (8:27). Though Paul's point is about prayer rather than the ontological question of the Trinity, this passage, as much as any other, points to the Personhood of the Holy Spirit as well as the Spirit's unity with God yet distinction from God.

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[125] Paul's use of the imagery of first-fruits here parallels his statements elsewhere that the gift of the Spirit is the down payment and guarantee of what is to come later, cf. 2 Co. 1:22; 5:5; Ep. 1:14.

[126] Modern English nuance of the word hope is much more tenuous than what was intended by this word in the New Testament. The New Testament takes its cue from the Old Testament, and hope was "expectation with the nuance of counting upon" something, especially the messianic hope. To be sure, it was in God's hands and timing, but it was believed to be certain all the same. Paul's use of hope carries this same assurance, cf. K. Rengstorf, *TDNT* (1964) 2.523-533.

[127] Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.599.

Victory in Jesus (8:28-39)

Paul's final crescendo in this passage has become one of the most beloved passage for Christians of all time. Before he gets there, however, he offers a prelude that connects what he has just said about God's promise of the future glory of believers with his utter confidence that God will fulfill what he has promised. This link consists of a summary statement of God's eternal purpose from the beginning to the end. Paul begins by assuring his readers that no matter what happens during this present period of travail, God's ultimate purpose is good for God-lovers (8:28)! The sovereign God works all things toward this ultimate end (lit., "God works together all things").[128] He controls circumstances and events to achieve his purposeful goal. He bends history toward his purpose, and the final goal is the "glorious freedom of the children of God" (8:21), the bringing together of all things under Christ as the one head (Ep. 1:10; Phil. 2:10-11; Col. 1:10), and the final triumph when God will be all in all (1 Co. 15:28). God's people have been called in alignment with this very purpose!

The links in this summary proceed in several clipped statements featuring the verbs *foreknew*, *predestined*, *conformed*, *called*, *justified* and *glorified* (8:29-30). Hardly any statement in the entire letter is more densely packed than this one. At the outset, it is important to observe that these statements are given in accusative plurals using the relative pronoun (**οὓς** = whom). In English translation, the plurals may not be immediately apparent, so translators often offer the words "those" or "those whom". The use of plurals is significant, since they suggest that Paul here deals with corporate concepts as opposed to simply the individual person. His focus is on the corporate body of Christians, whom he has designated "the ones who love God". In short, God foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified the company of God-lovers. That Paul is here addressing corporate categories is even more explicit in his later reference to divine foreknowledge, when he asks if God had rejected "his

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[128] Two recensions of 8:28 have come down to us, both with early attestation. In the one, the nominative subject is stated specifically (πάντα συνεργεῖ ὁ θεὸς = God works all things), and this reading is supported by some of the earliest copies of Paul's letters (p46, c. AD 200; Codex Vaticanus, 4th century; Codex Alexandrinus, 5th century). In the other recension, the subject is implied (πάντα συνεργεῖ = he/it works all things), and the subject must be derived from the third person singular present indicative verb and the context. The problem in this latter recension is that it is unclear whether the subject is derived from the preceding accusative clause (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν = to the ones loving God) or from the word πάντα (= all,). The older KJV translators followed the latter reading, that is, they took the expression "all things" as the subject of the sentence, translating this phrase "all things work together for good". In my thinking, it is doubtful that this is the best rendering, especially in light of the early attestations to the contrary. Many if not most modern translations keep God as the subject in spite of the textual issue, i.e., "God works all things" (so NIV, NASB, RSV, NAB, JB, TEV, TCNT, Goodspeed, exceptions being NRSV and ESV). Even if one follows the textual recension that has no clearly stated nominative subject, it still seems better to draw the subject from the preceding accusative clause. This is especially so, since the succeeding clauses also must take an implied subject, and one would hardly suppose that Paul intends "all things" as the subject of foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified!

people, whom he foreknew" (cf. 11:2a). Unfortunately, the tradition in much of Reformed Christianity was shaped too much by Renaissance individualism, and in spite of the explicit plural context of this passage, many tend to read it in the sense of the individual.[129] Such a pattern, of course, fits well with the Calvinistic notion of divine decree by which God chose in advance some humans to be saved and some to be damned. This is hardly Paul's point. Rather, God decided in advance that he would have a body of people who loved him, and he predetermined a destiny for this body of God-lovers through his grace.[130]

All along, the over-arching promise had been that in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. The giving of the Torah did not change that fundamental promise. God's eternal purpose was larger than the Torah, for even before the Torah existed, God foreknew his people—and he foreknew them in a category much broader than what the Torah defined (8:29a). He decided in advance that this body of God-lovers would become like Christ Jesus, his very own Son, who was the prototype Child, the firstborn[131] among the many who would follow him (8:29b). This process of being changed, as Paul says elsewhere, "into his [Christ's] likeness" (cf. 2 Co. 3:18), has already begun in the call to holiness, suffering and prayer, which Paul has just described (cf. 6:19, 22; 8:17, 26-27). Being conformed to the likeness of God's Son is what he earlier described as being "co-heirs with Christ" (cf. 8:17). It involves death, of course (cf. Phil. 3:10), but beyond death will come glorification. This goal will not be completed until that moment when glory "will be revealed in us" (cf. 8:18a).

In accord with this good purpose, God decided in advance (προορίζω = predestine, decide beforehand) to accomplish this end by calling, acquitting and glorifying the company of God-lovers (8:30). He speaks of this calling, acquitting and glorifying all in the past (aorist) tense in order to emphasize the unshakeable future God has predetermined.[132] The use of the aorist here does not imply that glorification is itself in the past (as, for instance, in Christian baptism), but rather that the ultimate goal of God's good purpose is viewed from the perspective of its

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[129] A good example is William Hendriksen, who comments that "God set his love on certain individuals…electing them to everlasting life and glory", cf. *Romans*, p. 282.

[130] W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 163-164.

[131] Paul's use of the term πρωτότοκος (= firstborn) is not a statement about Christ's origin, as though he were the first created being (as urged in the ancient world by Arius and in the modern by the Jehovah's Witnesses), but rather, it is a statement about Christ the first-born in a new humanity, resurrected and glorified, cf. *BAG* (1979), p. 726.

[132] The aorist verb in Greek, which views action as a single whole, has some special uses, one of which is to emphasize dramatically a reality with the certitude of a past event, cf. H. Dana and J. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), p. 198.

completion.[133]

In view of God's majestic, eternal purpose, now inaugurated by the coming of Jesus Christ and the bestowal of the messianic gift of the Holy Spirit, all that remains is Paul's profound exclamation of victory in Jesus! If this is what God has done and is doing, what response is appropriate? Nothing less than a welling up of exultant triumph in the God who keeps his covenant promises! If God has truly acted on our behalf in this way, what power exists that can possibly oppose him (8:31)? With a flurry of rhetorical questions, Paul forcefully punches home the exultant truth that God will never give up on his grand plan until everything is finished (8:31, 33-35)! To all these rhetorical questions, the answer is always the same—no one!

> *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (No one!)
> *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?* (No one!)
> *Who is he that condemns?* (No one!)
> *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (No one!)

In the midst of these questions, Paul adds after each one an illuminating exclamation. After the first question, he interjects the emphatic point that if God went so far as to surrender on our behalf his very own Son, he is not likely to give up on his goal before it is complete. Rather, he will certainly graciously give us everything he promised in Christ and with Christ (8:32)! After the second rhetorical question, Paul interjects the emphatic: It is God himself who acquits us (8:33b)! No prosecutor in heaven or hell can sustain a charge against those whom God has declared to be justified! After the third question, which raises the issue of condemnation (particularly, the condemnation of the Torah), Paul triumphantly shouts that Christ has died—even more, Christ has triumphed over death itself and now sits at God's right hand to intercede for us (8:34b)! His death resolved the condemnation against sin, for he died in our place (cf. 5:6-8)! This concept of intercession is very close to what John says, when he speaks of Christ as "speaking to the Father in our defense" (1 Jn. 2:1), and what the author of Hebrews says when he writes of Jesus as being "able to save completely…because he always lives to intercede for them" (He. 7:25). In the ancient song, the prophet was dismayed because justice was thwarted, and there was "no one to intercede" (Is. 59:15b-26). Job, similarly, lamented that between God and himself there was no one to arbitrate—no one "to lay his hand upon us both". But now, in the risen Christ seated at God's right hand, that alienation had been resolved! The one who was himself both human and divine, who both died and lived, has bridged the gap!

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[133] Dunn, pp. 485-486.

In view of this statement about Christ's intercessory role, two things should be observed. First, it would be a mistake to conclude that such a description implies that God remains angry at believers or that Christ lives continually to appease God's anger. In fact, Paul is very emphatic that it is God's love in Christ Jesus that has made reconciliation possible in the first place (cf. 5:8; 8:39). Whatever intercession means, it cannot mean that! Rather, what seems to be Paul's intent is that Christ's intercession is his mediatorial role as envisioned in the Servant's Song (cf. Is. 53:12b) and fulfilled in Christ (1 Ti. 2:5). This is essentially a priestly role, and Christ is the eternal and effective priest. Second, Christ's mediatorial role as intercessor throws into considerable doubt the trend in the medieval church to rely upon the intercessions of the saints and Mary, especially when Christ was depicted as an angry Judge, and a softer influence over him was believed to be achievable through the intervention of his mother.[134] Such a theology flies in the face of what Paul says here.

The fourth rhetorical question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?", again is followed by a series of related questions. Can trouble or hardship or persecution of famine or nakedness or danger or sword separate us from Christ's love (8:35b)? Paul certainly had experienced these same things in his missionaries travels (cf. 2 Co. 11:26-27). In fact, quoting one of the ancient poets of Israel, Paul frankly conceded that death and slaughter were real and constant threats (8:36; cf. Ps. 44:22). Still, the answer was a clear and emphatic, "No!": in all the painful and distressful experiences of life Christians are "over-conquerors"[135] through God's love expressed in the gift of his Son (cf. 8:31-32).

Paul's final triumphant claim was that nothing—absolutely nothing—could separate believers from God's love in Christ (8:38-39). The litany of threats he lists, like most Pauline lists, are suggestive of the types of things he intends rather than some attempt to be exhaustive. There is a certain amount of redundancy in some of the listed items, but for Paul's rhetorical purpose, they are effective. Previously, Paul had listed day-to-day hardships in what we sometimes call "real" life or physical life. Here, he lists threats from the more abstract forces that confront believers, and for Paul, they were just as "real" as the others: death, the most potent enemy of all (cf. 1 Co. 15:26); the challenge of daily living; supernatural powers like angels and heavenly rulers; both current and future distresses and uncertainties; the powers whether in heaven or earth; the forces in the heavenlies and the underworld; anything

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[134] By the 12th century, popular piety began to regard Mary as more lenient than her Son, who as the Judge of the world was believed to be more severe, cf. T. Finger, *EDT* (1984) p. 866. Even modern Roman Catholic theologians, who are more careful in their articulation of this point in dogma, still insist that "Our Lady's intercession must carry greater weight with her Son than that of any other saint," cf. N. Doornik, S. Jelsma and A. Van de Lisdonk, *A Handbook of the Catholic Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 242.

[135] A heightened form of "to conquer" meaning, more or less, "we are winning a most glorious victory", cf. *BAG* (1979) p. 841.

else in the whole created world—nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate believers from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Paul has now reached the climax of what he began back in chapter five, the progression from hopeless to hope to victory to glory. He frames the whole discussion at the beginning and at the end with God's love, both in sending his Son to die in our behalf (cf. 5:8) and guaranteeing that nothing in the whole universe can drive a wedge between us and his redeeming, all-surpassing love (cf. 8:39).

Israel in God's Eternal Plan (9:1 - 11:36)

So far, Paul has called upon three individuals, each of whom illustrate solidarity with the larger human race: Adam, Abraham and Jesus Christ. The first two appear prior to the establishment of the nation Israel. Adam and Abraham were neither Israelites nor Jews.[136] Jesus of Nazareth, of course, was both Israelite and Jewish, and as Paul says at the beginning of his letter, he was "as to his human nature…a descendent of David". Nonetheless, it is not Jesus' Jewishness that looms most significant for Paul, but rather, his parallelism with Adam as the head of a new creation. Further, Paul has indicated that the Torah, divinely given at the time Israel was called out of Egypt to be a distinctive people, was nevertheless not intended as the means of righteousness. Instead, the Torah was given "that the trespass might increase" (cf. 5:20). To be sure, the Torah was spiritual, holy, righteous and good (cf. 7:12, 14a), but it lacked power in itself to accomplish that lofty ideal toward which it called the people of Israel (cf. 8:3). Nothing stands in sharper contrast than the conventional view of the Torah and Paul's view.

Conventional View

> *In fact, since the law has told us not to covet, I could prove to you all the more that reason is able to control desires. Just so it is with the emotions that hinder one from justice. [ ] Thus, as soon as a man adopts a way of life in accordance with the law, he is forced to act contrary to his natural ways. [ ] In all other matters we can recognize that reason rules the emotions. [ ] It is evident that reason rules even the more violent emotions… [ ] To the mind he gave the law; and one who lives subject to this will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good, and courageous.* (4 Maccabees 2:6, 8, 9b, 15a, 23)

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[136] While the terms Israelite and Jew are sometimes used interchangeably, more specifically an Israelite is a descendant of Jacob, while a Jew is a citizen of the state of Judah (Je. 32:12; 40:11). After the exile, the term Jew continued in usage to refer to the post-exilic people of Israel in contrast to Gentiles (Est. 9:15-19; Da. 3:8; Zec. 8:23, etc.), cf. J. Sanders, *IDB* (1962) 2.897-898.

Paul's View

I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. (Ro. 7:7-8)

I would not have known what sin was except through the law. (Ro. 7:7a)

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. (Ro. 5:20a)

Conventional View

He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. (Sirach 17:11)

He made him hear his voice, and led him into the thick darkness, and gave him the commandments face to face, the law of life and knowledge… (Sirach 45:5)

Hear the commandments of life, O Israel; give ear, and learn wisdom! (Baruch 3:9)

Paul's View

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. (Ro. 7:10)

Hence, Paul concludes that "what the law could not do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son" (cf. 8:3).

If the meaning of the Torah was defined outside the conventional box, it follows that Paul's interpretation of the meaning of Israel also falls outside the conventional box. It is the meaning of Israel that next occupies Paul's mind. Paul hinted about this earlier, when he said that true Jewishness was essentially inward, not outward (cf. 2:28-29). He added the assertion that the true offspring of Abraham were the people of faith—with or without the Torah (cf. 4:16-18). Everything that Paul has said about the Torah begs the question of the meaning of Israel. Some interpreters have read Romans 9-11 as almost incidental to the larger theological purpose of the Letter to the Romans, but such a view can hardly be sustained.[137] In fact, it may not be too much to say that everything Paul has argued so far in Romans 1-8 leads the reader directly into the subject of Romans 9-11, where he addresses the meaning of Israel. After the Jews had been expelled from Rome by Claudius Caesar in about AD 49, there were several years when the Roman church necessarily

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[137] Perhaps the most striking example of this treatment of Romans 9-11 as incidental to the larger argument of the book came from C. H. Dodd, who argued that these chapters were possibly a sermon Paul composed for some other occasion and decided to slip it into the Roman letter as an example of his preaching. Dodd contended that one could go from the end of chapter 8 straight to the beginning of chapter 12 without losing anything in the process, cf. C. Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Collins Fontana, 1959), pp. 161-163. Such an approach fails to do justice to the larger argument of the book, cf. D. SeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2004), p. 619.

developed along non-Jewish lines. When at his death in AD 54 Claudius was succeeded by Gaius Caesar (Caligula), the edict of exile was rescinded, and Jews who returned to Rome would have found a predominantly non-Jewish church. It makes both psychological and literary sense that a significant part of the Roman letter was intended to address the resulting tension. Both sides had adjustments to make, and Paul's discussions about the role of the Torah and the meaning of Jewishness would have been especially apropos.[138]

We know that among early Christians the meaning of Israel was an important issue. The New Testament is replete with the use of traditional Jewish vocabulary to describe Christians, such as, "the Twelve tribes," the "Diaspora", "Israel" and "the Jews" (e.g., Ga. 6:16; Ja. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:1; 2:9; Rv. 2:9; 3:9). Christian churches sometimes still retained the title "synagogue" for their assemblies (cf. Ja. 2:2, Greek text), and this usage continued into the post-apostolic period (cf. Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandates,* 11; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.6.1).[139] 1 Clement, dating from about the turn of the 1st century, was composed in a typical Jewish format, including a *haggadah,* while the Epistle of Barnabas, from about the same period, contains both *haggadah* (= lore, story, narrative) and *halakah* (= law, how things are done).[140] Clement of Rome sums up this viewpoint succinctly when he describes Christians as the righteous descendents of the ancient people of God (1 Clement XLV-XLVI). The question of the meaning of Israel has occupied the minds of later Christians as well. Some from the Reformed tradition often adopt a replacement theory, that is, that the Christian church replaced ancient Israel as the true Israel. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, opt for maintaining a tight distinction between Israel and the church, so much so that it can be properly stated that *the* distinguishing mark of dispensationalism is a belief in two peoples of God, separate and distinct.[141]

This question about the meaning of Israel must have loomed large for the constituents of the Roman church, especially if Christian Jews had returned to Rome only to find that the leadership in the Roman church was now composed of those who were non-Jewish. It may well be that some in the Roman church resented their return. In any case, the situation sharpened the question about who was the true Israel? Earlier in the letter, Paul reprimanded those Jews who claimed spiritual superiority because they had received the Torah (cf. 2:17ff.). At the same time, when he posed the question, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?", he responded with the emphatic, "Much in every way" (cf. 3:1-2)! Paul also stated in unambiguous language that the gospel of Jesus Christ was "first for the Jew, then for

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[138] B. Byrne, *Romans [Sacra Pagina 6]* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 12.

[139] Cited by W. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 154, note 2.

[140] Frend, p. 122.

[141] C. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), pp. 24-27.

the Gentile" (cf. 1:16b). Here, then, Paul will take up the question about Israel in earnest.

Paul's Distress Over Israel's Unbelief (9:1-5)

Paul begins with his acute grief over the fact that most of his Jewish fellows had not accepted the messiahship of Jesus (9:1-2), a belief that was necessary for salvation. Initially, he does not say this explicitly, but his later expression makes clear that this was his intent (cf. 10:1). His triple assertion ("I speak the truth in Christ", "I am not lying", "my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit"), as Wright has pointed out, suggests his intense concern that his Gentile readers might very well be prepared to write off the Jews as unworthy of the Christian circle.[142] The hyperbole that he could even wish himself under God's curse in their place intensifies his words of distress,[143] and at the same time, makes clear his belief that apart from Christ, his Jewish fellows were outside God's salvation (9:3). Still, the Jewish heritage was great, with many advantages (9:4; cf. 3:1-2). Here, Paul retraces the wonderful benefits bestowed upon the people of Israel in the Book of Exodus. Not only had they been entrusted with the oracles of God (cf. 3:1-2), they had received the initial promise of sonship (Ex. 4:22-23), the revelation of God's glory in the redemption from Egypt (Ex. 15:11; 16:6-7, 10; 24:15-16; 29:42-43; 40:34-35), the covenant (Ex. 24:1-11),[144] the laws of the Torah (Ex. 24:12-18), the Tent of Meeting and ritual for worship (Ex. 25-30), and the promises for the future (Ex. 3:17; 12:25; 13:11; 19:5-6; 32:13; 33:1). Along with what happened in the exodus, God had given the people of Israel an ancestry in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who also were the ancestors of Jesus Christ (9:5)!

The final phrase of 9:5 is capable of more than one rendering, depending upon the translator's interpretation of the punctuation.[145] The NIV offers the major options:

> *...Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.*
> *...Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised! Amen.*
> *...Christ. God who is over all be forever praised! Amen.*

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[142] Wright, *NID* (2002) X.627.

[143] Lit., Paul says, "For I was praying myself to be a curse…" (ηὐχόμην γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτος ἐγὼ), though most English versions offer the softer rending of "wish" instead of "pray".

[144] Lit., "covenants". Because of the plural word, many interpreters suggest Paul had in mind all the covenants throughout Israelite history (i.e., Moses, David, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.), but if Paul here is thinking primarily of the narratives in Exodus, it seems more likely that he intends the various articulations of the covenant in the primordial exodus period (i.e., Ex. 31:16; 34:10, 27-28).

[145] As most people are aware, there is no formal punctuation in the earliest manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, at least as we are used to seeing it in English translations. Punctuation is the decision of the translator based upon context, typical usage by a given author, word order, etc.

There are good reasons for accepting the first option as the best, in which Christ is directly ascribed to be God (so NIV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, JB, Weymouth, Alford, Knox, Montgomery).[146] On philological and contextual grounds, this seems the most natural punctuation, so much so that, as Cullmann states, it is "quite probable, if not certain".[147] N. T. Wright adds that this fits best with Paul's overall argument, since the Messiah is Israel's "highest privilege and final hope, the embodiment of their sovereign Lord, their covenant God". This is the one whom they rejected, first at Sinai in the episode of the golden calf and now in Jesus of Nazareth.[148]

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (9:6-13)

Paul now embarks on an extended tour through the story of Israel, truncated, to be sure, but complete in the essential points. He moves from Abraham to Isaac the son of Sarah, from Isaac and Rebekah's twins to Jacob, the single ancestor of the twelve tribes, and finally, from Moses and the exodus to the prophets and the concept of a remnant. The fundamental question is: *Who is the true Israel?* Paul's answer is: *The true Israel must be defined as the children of the promise, not the descendants of natural procreation!* The focus throughout is on corporate solidarity. Unfortunately, many of the Reformers and their disciples since the 16th century have been so fascinated with the question of individual salvation, they lost almost entirely this corporate focus. In doing so, they jerked this chapter out of its context and made it serve purposes for which it was never intended. More recently, scholars have gained a much greater appreciation for the Hebrew concept of corporate solidarity and have begun to treat this passage more along the lines of Hebraic thought.

If all these wonderful advantages attended the people of Israel—sonship, glory, covenants, Torah, worship and promise—could it be that God's word to them had fallen short? Not at all! It was Israel who tripped up, not God! The critical issue for Paul derives from the concept of remnant, the ancient idea that there is a part left over, a group of survivors, to whom the blessings would be given. Hence, as Paul states his primary thesis, *Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel* (9:6). The meaning of Israel cannot be confined to a bloodline as though that were the single defining characteristic. As Paul asserted earlier, true Jewishness is first and foremost a matter of faith (cf. 2:28-29; 4:16; 8:14). Those of the bloodline of Abraham are not by that fact alone to be reckoned as the ones about whom God spoke when he said that in Abraham's seed all families of the earth would be blessed (9:7a). The most

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[146] Versions that opt for one of the other possibilities include RSV, NEB, CEV, and NAB.

[147] O. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. S. Guthrie and C. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 313.

[148] Wright, *NIB* (2002), X.631.

obvious case in point was Isaac, who *was* the son of promise (cf. Ge. 17:17-21), while Ishmael, the child born to Abraham and Hagar, was *not* the one to whom the promise pointed (9:7b; cf. Ge. 21:12).[149] Hence, Paul can properly conclude that natural pedigree was not the sole factor for defining the posterity to whom God promised the blessing. Rather, the decisive factor was God's sovereign choice as expressed through his promise (9:8). Hence, Abraham's children now were divided into two lines, the "children of flesh" and the "children of promise".[150] Both were not reckoned as the children of God. Only Isaac, who was the object of God's promise from the beginning, could be so reckoned (cf. Ge. 18:10, 14). In corporate terms, this distinction equally applied to the posterity of Isaac and Ishmael, for the two boys also represent two peoples. God's promise certainly had not fallen short! Even to Abraham and Sarah, who were 100 and 90 years old respectively, God had made good on his word. Still, the functional role of being "the children of God" was determined by God himself.

Paul's second example is Isaac and Rebekah, the parents of the twins Esau and Jacob (9:10). Though Isaac was the father of both, the promise that began with Abraham did not pass to both sons. Instead, even before the twins were born, God's sovereign choice was made clear. It was not based on anything the boys themselves contributed, for God's choice was established even before they were born so that his divine purpose would be accomplished just as he intended (9:11). It certainly was not a meritorious choice based upon any works of the law, and in any case, both boys lived long before the giving of the Torah. Instead, it depended entirely upon God's word in his promise "the older will serve the younger" (9:12; cf. Ge. 25:23). The context is extremely important here. God's "purpose" and "election", as Paul's describes it, concerned the promise of blessing to the nations, that is, it concerned the messianic hope. Unfortunately, in the Protestant discussions about Calvinism and Arminianism, this "purpose" and "election" was taken in the sense of personal salvation for Jacob and personal damnation for Esau. That is hardly Paul's point, and it absolutely flies in the face of the context. Paul's point is that God chose Jacob and his offspring to be his people, not Esau and the Edomites. Jacob was God's chosen instrument by which to trace the ancestry of the people of Israel. As a final clincher, Paul quotes Malachi's dialogue, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (9:13; cf. Mal. 1:1-2). Clearly the passage in Malachi is corporate in nature, for the issue there is whether or not God loves the post-exilic remnant of Israel. The question is not who can be saved or damned by God's predetermination, but rather, what nation had been

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[149] The force of this point, while it may seem obscure to westerners, is definitely not lost upon the Muslims, who trace their heritage back to Ishmael, making the same claims for him as the Hebrew Bible does for Isaac.

[150] The NIV obscures Paul's strict parallel language, where he juxtaposes τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς (= children of the flesh) and τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας (= children of the promise).

chosen to serve Yahweh as an instrument of his covenant.

Moses and the Prophets (9:14-33)

From the patriarchs, Paul now moves to Moses and the prophets. As he before, he poses a rhetorical question about God's justice (9:14; cf. 3:5). Since God chose Isaac and not Ishmael as the channel for covenant blessing, and since he chose Jacob and not Esau in the same way, does this mean that God is unfair? Not at all! God's mercy and compassion—his choice of one family line for service rather than the other—clearly flow from his sovereignty as God. In quoting Exodus 33:19 from the narrative about Moses on Mt. Sinai, Paul recalls the dialogue between Moses and God concerning the trip from Sinai to Canaan. Israel had rebelled with a high hand in the incident of the golden calf (Ex. 32). In response, Yahweh bluntly told Moses that he would send his angel with them to Canaan, but he would not go with them himself (Ex. 33:1-6). In fact, in this dialogue God seems not entirely to have decided what to do with these rebellious children. It is in this context that Moses interceded for the people, pleading for them and reminding God that these were, for better or worse, his people (Ex. 33:13b). If God's intimate presence (lit., פָּנִים = his "face") did not accompany the Israelites from Sinai, it would be better for them not to leave at all. In the end, to go to Canaan without Yahweh's presence would mean that the people of Israel were no different than any other people—they would cease to be the chosen people of God (Ex. 33:15-16).

In response to Moses' intercession, God consented to go with the people to Canaan (Ex. 33:14, 17). It is in this context, then, that Moses was privileged to see the train of God's glory and hear the proclamation of his divine sovereignty: *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion* (Ex. 33:19). This proclamation reaffirmed God's sovereign choice of Israel to be his people, but it did so in such a way as to emphasize that while Israel was the recipient of God's grace, his grace was not something that could be presumed upon.[151] In no way did Israel have a claim upon God's mercy. In view of their rebellion, it was truly a gift of grace.

So, Paul concludes, God's gracious choice for service did not depend upon any human merit but solely on God's merciful character (9:16). Israel on this occasion certainly did not deserve to remain God's people; yet, they were allowed to continue in this role due to God's compassion and mercy. The same thing was true of Pharaoh. Even though he rebelled against God's intention to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, God did not immediately destroy him. Instead, God continued to use Pharaoh

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[151] R. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), p. 78.

to serve his own divine purposes (9:17a). Neither Pharaoh nor Israel deserved to live. Nevertheless, God determined to use both Pharaoh and Israel in spite of themselves. In the end, God's mercy was extended in spite of human rebellion, and his hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not an arbitrary act. Both Pharaoh and Israel became the means by which God's name was "proclaimed in all the earth" (9:17b-18).

Once more, it should be apparent from the context that Paul's recollection of the exodus narratives concerned God's choice for service rather than a choice for salvation or damnation. Cranfield's conclusion bears repeating: "The assumption that Paul is here thinking of the ultimate destiny of the individual, of his final salvation or final ruin, is not justified by the text."[152]

Concerning God's sovereign choice to use individuals or even nations for his higher purposes, someone might object that this was unfair. If both Pharaoh and Israel were rebellious, and more to the point, if God hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely in order to use him, in the end destroying Pharaoh and sparing Israel, does this not simply imply that all humans are puppets (9:19)? To this hypothetical question, Paul appeals to Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9, where the prophet compares God and Israel to a potter and his clay. He also probably alludes to the Wisdom of Solomon 12:12: *For who will say, 'What hast thou done? Or who will resist thy judgment?* The potter has every right to form the clay as he wishes (9:20), that is to say, God has every right to use people and nations as he determines best for his ultimate plans. Again drawing from the Wisdom of Solomon, Paul asserts that it is the potter's right to form some pots for kosher use and others for common use (9:21).

> *For when a potter kneads the soft earth and laboriously molds each vessel for our service, he fashions out of the same clay both the vessels that serve clean uses and those for contrary uses, making all in like manner; but which shall be the use of each of these the worker in clay decides.*
>
> Wisdom of Solomon 15:7

Still bearing in mind the story of Pharaoh and the Egyptian bondage, Paul poses the hypothetical question about whether God would patiently put up with rebellious creatures in order that a greater goal might be accomplished—the goal of demonstrating his glory (9:22-23). Even rebels like Pharaoh, who were "fitted for destruction", God tolerated temporarily in order to bless the Israelites. What was true of Pharaoh was no less true of ancient Israel. God tolerated rebellious Israel for this same reason—that in the end, he might bless both Jews and Gentiles with salvation (9:24). He could have destroyed rebellious Israel, and he would have been righteous

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[152] C. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans [ICC]* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 2.489.

if he had done so. But, there was a larger purpose, and that purpose was firmly linked with the ancient promise to Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed in his posterity.

Moving from the exodus to Hosea, Paul quotes Yahweh's word to his prophet that the ones who had been rejected would now be reclaimed (9:25-26; cf. Ho. 2:23; 1:10). Gomer's illegitimate children, named "not loved" and "not my people" (cf. Ho. 1:6, 8-9), represented the northern Israelites in their covenant rebellion against Yahweh (Ho. 1:2). Yet, these same people who were alienated from God would one day be reclaimed as "loved" and as the "sons of the living God" (Ho. 1:10; 2:1). For Paul, such promises to the northern Israelites illustrated perfectly his thesis concerning the non-Jews, for in a strange way the northern Israelites, rejected by Judah, paralleled the Gentiles, rejected by the Jews. Citing Isaiah, Paul further urges that the multiplication of Israelites was not in itself a sign of salvation, since Isaiah predicted that only a remnant of the nation would survive for salvation (9:27; cf. Is. 10:22-23). Here, Isaiah anticipates the exile. From the exile in Mesopotamia, only a remnant would come back, for God would judge the rebellious Israelites for their covenant violations, sending them "on a journey I said you should never make again" (cf. Dt. 28:68).

Still, the exile was never God's final word. On the other side of the exile, a remnant would survive, a "seed" or group of descendents who were heirs of God's promises (9:29; cf. Is. 1:9). God did not destroy the Israelites as he had destroyed the cities of the plain (cf. Ge. 19). His sovereign purpose in history called for a remnant, a small group of survivors, who were to be the channel of his promised blessing for the world. This blessing comes not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. It comes to those who once were "not a people" and "not loved" but now are "sons of the living God"! Hence, pedigree could never be the basis of defining the true Israel, else the exile would have no theological meaning. The number of Israelites indeed was multiplied, but only a remnant would be saved! A few verses later, Paul will call this a "remnant chosen by grace" (cf. 11:5).

Paul's final clinching argument from the prophets, again prompted by the rhetorical "what shall we say", is that the non-Jews outside the Torah, actually have gained righteousness, albeit through faith rather than Torah observance (9:30). By contrast, the people of Israel, even though they possessed the Torah and vigorously practiced Torah intensification in order to achieve righteousness, fell short (9:31). This shortfall was directly attributable to the fact that in their pursuit of righteousness, they attempted to use Torah intensification rather than faith as the means to this end. In so doing, they tripped themselves over the greatest of all objects of faith, Jesus Christ, the messiah (9:32). He was, as Isaiah predicted, the "stumbling stone" (Is. 8:11-15; 28:16).

The word of Yahweh to Isaiah in the political turmoil of the 8th century BC—a circumstance in which King Ahaz of Israel was being threatened by Rezin and Pekah—was that only in God himself was there a true sanctuary from the powers of evil. If this sanctuary in Yahweh was rejected, then Yahweh would himself become a stumbling stone, a trap and a snare to the unbelievers. Ahaz, a ruler of weak and vacillating policies who was fascinated with paganism, wanted to trust his own military and defense resources. In doing so, he stumbled over the stumbling stone. This oracle in Isaiah immediately precedes the prophecy of the coming messiah (Is. 9:1-7), who would reign on David's throne and whose kingdom would never end. Paul's readers surely would have known of this messianic prophecy, and they would have made the clear connection, contrasting Ahaz' unbelief, on the one hand, with the promise of the coming of David's greater son on the other.

The second Isaianic passage comes from an oracle about Ephraim, the northern nation. Though northern Israel felt secure, conditions were ripe for judgment. In view of this coming disaster in the north, the people of Judah must listen well! The leaders in Jerusalem felt that because of their political coalitions, they, too, were secure, but such maneuvering was little more than a covenant with death. The only solid defense against the encroaching Assyrians was the tested stone in Zion, the Rock laid by God himself. For Paul, this Rock was none other than Jesus Christ! Only by trusting in him would salvation come. It is likely that in quoting this passage from Isaiah, Paul also intends an implicit connection with a much more ancient reference to God as the Rock, where Israel is also described as rejecting the Rock, their Savior (cf. Dt. 32:15).

All this discussion bears directly upon the question of who is the true Israel, the covenant community. The covenant community is not, as was popularly assumed by the Jews, simply composed of those who could trace their bloodline back to the patriarchs. Rather, as the prophets themselves preached, the covenant community was composed of the people of faith! Even non-Jews who came to faith fulfilled the intent of the Torah, and therefore, they, too, were part of the covenant community!

Only One Way (10:1-21)

Paul's deep grief that his own people by and large had rejected Jesus as the messiah (cf. 9:1-2) drove his passionate prayers for their salvation (10:1). Earlier, Paul had "prayed" that he could be cursed in their place, though here he more fully explains that his real prayer is not so much that he could be cursed but that they would be saved. He knew, of course, their zeal for Torah intensification (10:2a), and in fact, himself had traveled that road with vigor (cf. Phil. 3:4-6). Still, he now knew that the pursuit of righteousness by Torah intensification was, to use the language of the Proverbs, "zeal without knowledge", which in turn made one "miss the way"

(10:2b; cf. Pro. 19:2). In their history, the Israelites had not achieved the righteousness for which they so earnestly longed, precisely because they sought it through Torah intensification, a way that was impossible (10:3a; cf. 3:20; Ga. 2:16; 3:11). They chose their own way toward righteousness, refusing to submit to God's way, which is by faith (10:3b; cf. 9:30). The coming of Jesus Christ brought the curtain down on this inadequacy, for the arrival of the Messiah heralded the true goal and fulfillment of the Torah (10:4a).[153] If the messiah is the true goal of the Torah, then the messiah's arrival means that righteousness is now possible for all who put their faith in Jesus (10:4b).

The contrast between the way of Torah intensification and the way of faith could hardly be more pronounced. The one is the attempt to achieve righteousness by "doing", as described by Moses (10:5; cf. Lv. 18:5), and the other is to seek righteousness by believing God's good news from one's heart, as also described by Moses (10:6a). The way of righteousness by faith does not attempt to "do" something, however heroic. The language about "bringing Christ down" and "bringing Christ up" obviously suggests incarnation and resurrection, but in either case, these are acts of God alone. They can never be construed as something in which humans had a hand. Here Paul appeals to Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where Moses urged the Israelites to follow God's Torah from their hearts (10:6-8a). This was the true righteousness by faith and the very goal toward which the Torah aimed! The preceding chapters in Deuteronomy describe the covenant blessings and cursings (Dt. 27-28). The last and greatest curse was the threat of exile (Dt. 28:64-68). Yet, even though exile was anticipated, the possibility still remained for covenant renewal on the other side of exile (Dt. 29).

It is out of this covenant renewal that Moses urged the Israelites that God's word would be "near" them, in their mouths and in their hearts (Dt. 30:14). It is hard to believe that Paul is not here directly implying a connection between Moses' teachings about covenant renewal and the new covenant predictions of Jeremiah (cf. Je. 31:31-34). For Paul, all these anticipations have come to pass. Israel has indeed gone into exile, and now, in the coming of Jesus Christ, the renewal of the covenant—in fact, a new covenant—has been established! It is a covenant where

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[153] Paul's term τέλος (= end, goal, outcome) has most often been understood in the sense of termination or abolition. This understanding has produced an almost irreconcilable tension with Jesus' statement in Mt. 5:17. Much better is it to take τέλος in the sense of goal or fulfillment, not only to eliminate the tension between Paul and Jesus, but to eliminate the tension between Paul and himself, when he asserts that the Torah is not nullified by faith (cf. 3:31a), that "the righteous requirements of the Torah might be fully met in us" (cf. 8:4), and that "love is the fulfillment of the Torah" (cf. 13:8, 10). By τέλος Paul does not mean the Torah has been abolished, but rather, that it has reached its goal (cf. Ga. 3:24). Hence, Paul can speak of a "Torah of faith" (cf. 3:27) and a "Torah of the Spirit" (cf. 8:2). He can equally say that believers in Christ Jesus actually "uphold the Torah" (cf. 3:31b). In Christ and by the coming of the messianic gift of the Spirit God finally has done what the Torah aimed at all along—to give life!

righteousness comes by faith, and that faith is the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord along with a firm commitment to the testimony that God raised him from the dead (10:8b-9). This is the very "word of faith" intended by Moses. This is the very confession with which Paul began the Roman letter (cf. 1:2-4, 16-17). This and only this is the confession that saves. This is the confession that comes by faith leading to true righteousness. It is internal, not external (10:10). It is a matter of trusting God, not trusting in one's own efforts at Torah intensification (10:11; cf. Is. 28:16). It does not depend upon pedigree, for in this new covenant of faith, there can no longer be any distinction between Jew and Gentile, since Christ Jesus is Lord of all and gives the gift of salvation to any and everyone who asks (10:12-13; cf. Jl. 2:32). Earlier, Paul had urged that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile with respect to sin (cf. 3:9, 22b-23). Now, he equally affirms the other side, that there is no difference in the way of salvation, either (cf. 3:23-24). If Joel had predicted the gift of the Holy Spirit to "the survivors whom Yahweh calls" (cf. Jl. 2:32b), that remnant is now to be defined by their faith.

At the very beginning of his letter, Paul asserted his calling to both Greeks and foreigners (cf. 1:14-15). At the end of his letter, he will describe his intent to preach the gospel to the west of Rome (cf. 15:15-24, 28). Here, then, is the theological undergirding of his mission. If God intends the gospel for both Jews and Gentile so that any and everyone who calls on him can be saved, then missionary work is absolutely necessary. With four rhetorical questions, Paul punctuates this necessity (10:14):

> *How can they call on the one in whom they have not believed?*
> *How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?*
> *How can they hear unless someone preaches to them?*
> *How can someone preach unless they have been sent?*

He concludes with the proclamation of the good news described in the servant passages of Isaiah (Is. 52:7; cf. Nah. 1:15). The fact that the Septuagint used the verb εὐαγγελίζω for "preaching" was surely not lost upon the early Christians, since it was the verbal form of the term "gospel".

Still, not everyone had accepted the gospel, for the 4th servant song also posed the question, "Who has believed our report" (Is. 53:1), which prefaces the statement that the Servant was despised and rejected (Is. 53:3)?[154] Faith cannot arise without the

[154] It is not entirely clear to whom Paul refers in this litany of evangelistic questions and statements, the Gentiles or the Israelites or both. The NIV narrows the passage to the Israelites, and actually adds the word "Israelites" to the text of 10:16, even though the Greek text does not contain it and reads simply "not all have obeyed". However, since this text follows hard on the heels of Paul's assertion about Gentiles obtaining a righteousness by faith (cf.

hearing of the message, and the message is the good news about Jesus Christ (10:17).

Paul now concludes this section with a series of Old Testament quotations in response to the question, "Didn't they hear" (10:18a)? He seeks to demonstrate that indeed they have heard! But how? Perhaps Paul has in mind the cosmic message of Jesus' resurrection proclaimed to the world on Easter, something along the lines of Colossians 1:5-6, 23b. On the other hand, Paul may be referring to his missionary work in the east about which he later will state he had fully proclaimed the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (cf. 15:19). In any case, there is some sense in which the world has "heard" the gospel, but the responses to it have been varied. Psalm 19:1-4, speaking of the implicit witness in the created universe somewhat along the lines that Paul described in the beginning of the letter (cf. 1:19-20), says that the heavens and skies "pour forth speech". But how about Israel? Did Israel not hear the message? Did they not know that the blessing of salvation would be given to non-Jews? They certainly should have known! As far back as Moses' final speech to the Israelites, the prediction was given that when Israel would break their covenant with Yahweh and be rejected in exile (Dt. 32:15-20), this rejection would incite envy among the Israelites toward the surrounding nations. In Deuteronomy, the play on words is between *no god* and *no people.* Just as Israel would reject Yahweh in preference for idolatry (a *no god* religion), thus stirring him to jealousy, so in exile Yahweh would stir the Israelites to jealousy by turning to a non-Israelite nation (a *no people* group).[155] God was now doing exactly this in sending the gospel to the Gentiles! Isaiah clearly supports this line of thought, showing that God would reveal himself to those outside the Jewish commonwealth who had not even sought him (10:20; cf. Is.65:1). Alongside this shocking reversal, God's plea to Israel would be met only with stubbornness and rejection (10:21; cf. Is. 65:2). No wonder that this turn of events, even though predicted by the prophets, caused in Paul overwhelming grief and the prayer that his own people might turn to Jesus the Messiah and be saved (cf. 9:1-3; 10:1).

God Did Not Reject His People Israel (11:1-10)

This is now the ninth time Paul has posed a leading question based on what he has just said (cf. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14) to which the answer, as before, is always, "May it not be" (11:1a)![156] God has not put aside[157] his people Israel, just as Samuel once declared in his farewell speech (cf. 1 Sa. 12:22). Paul has just described

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9:30) and his following conclusion that Christ as the Lord of all, both Jew and Gentile (cf. 10:12-13), it seems unwarranted to restrict the statement in 10:16 to the Israelites only.

[155] A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 388.

[156] See footnote #95

[157] ἀπωθέω = to repudiate, push aside

the shocking reversal in which the prophets described Israel as a disobedient, obstinate people and the Gentiles as finding God even while not seeking him directly (cf. 10:20-21). Still, this reversal was not the end of the road for Israel. The covenant God was not so easily thwarted, and Paul was himself a prime example of a Jew whom God had not rejected (11:1b; cf. Phil. 3:4b-6). God's foreknowledge that he would call into his service the people of Israel, of which Paul spoke earlier (cf. 8:29), was an integral part of his long range plan. Even Elijah, who doubted there was even a single faithful Israelite left other than himself (cf. 1 Kg. 19:9b-10), was most certainly wrong. Even in the dark days of Ahab's kingship, there still was a remnant of faith seven thousand strong (11:2b-4). In the same way, at the present time there also was a remnant chosen by God's grace (11:5). Of course, this remnant did not represent all those who were descended from Abraham, even for those Jews who could track their pedigree backward with some degree of confidence. Further, this remnant was not to be defined by those intent on Torah intensification; rather, the remnant was strictly to be defined by God's gracious gift, for if inclusion into the people of God were based on anything other than God's grace, the definition of grace itself would fall (11:6). Paul's words here should prevent anyone from adopting the so-called "replacement theology", that is, that Israel was replaced by the Gentile church as the chosen people of God. If Paul had intended such an idea, he could never have asserted that God did not reject Israel whom he foreknew.

The people of Israel eagerly worked toward achieving and maintaining their status as the chosen people of God, but in fact, the history of Israel from beginning to end demonstrated that even among the Israelites there was a watershed with respect to faith. Some of them, to be sure, *were* qualified as God's chosen people, but others, also Israelites, became hardened in unbelief, thus disqualifying themselves (11:7). As before, when Paul speaks of election he speaks of corporate categories rather than single individuals. The "elect" here is the body of those chosen by grace. The testimony both of Deuteronomy and Isaiah show that the unbelievers in their day were in a veritable spiritual stupor that prevented them from seeing and hearing the message of faith—and in fact, that same spiritual stupor still was to be found among the unbelieving Jews of Paul's world (11:8; cf. Dt. 29:4; Is. 29:10; 2 Co. 3:14-15).

In a sense, there were two Israels—the Israel of faith chosen by grace (the remnant) and the Israel of unbelief (the rest), hardened in rebellion toward God and his messiah. That God hardened them in unbelief was a judgment on their lack of response to his pleading. God said, "All day long I have held out my hands" (cf. 10:21), and in the face of no repentance, God hardened them so that their final judgment would be shown to be just. This is no more than Jesus himself said in his parabolic teachings: *To him who has will be given more, but…whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him* (Mt. 13:12). This hardening is not, as

some Calvinists have supposed, God's predetermined choice of some for reprobation; rather, it is God's judgment on those who do not believe. In the Psalms, David says the same thing (11:9-10; cf. Ps. 69:22-23). After the messianic passages that speak about the vinegar and gall (cf. Ps. 69:19-21; Mt. 27:34, 48), the curse upon those who reject God's messiah is the terrible judgment of entrapment in unbelief. When anyone perpetually closes his or her mind to the Holy Spirit's offer of the gracious gift of God's Son, God hardens them in their rejection. This is the sin for which there is no pardon (cf. Mt. 12:31-32; 1 Jn. 5:16-17). At the same time, as the next passage will demonstrate, anyone who opens his or her heart to God's appeal, if they "do not persist in unbelief" (cf. 11:23a), will be included in God's people!

So "All" Israel Will Be Saved (11:11-32)

Now Paul reaches the climax of his discussion of Israel and what truly defines the chosen people of God. For the last time in his letter, he asks a question to be immediately followed by, "May it never be!" Israel has stumbled over the stumbling stone, Jesus the messiah. Is this a fall beyond recovery? Absolutely not! Instead, this stumbling has become the means by which salvation has come to non-Jews. At the same time, the gift of salvation to non-Jews causes the Jews to be envious of God's blessing, giving them a strong incentive also to turn to God's messiah in faith (11:11; cf. 10:19). The general failure of the Jews to accept Jesus as their messiah is the express means by which non-Jews could find salvation (11:12). This idea goes back to what Paul stated in the beginning of the letter—that the gospel of Jesus Christ is "first for the Jew; then for the Gentile" (cf. 1:16). Since the people of Israel were the chosen means by which God would bring to the world the Savior, it was only right that they should be the ones first exposed to the gospel. Their rejection of the message, however, meant that the missionaries were free to turn to non-Jews with the message. This is exactly how Paul conducted his missionary tours in Asia and Greece. His "custom" was always first to go to the synagogue (Ac. 14:1; 17:2), but if/when the synagogue Jews rejected his words about Jesus, he turned to the non-Jews (cf. Ac. 13:44-46; 18:4-6; 19:8-10; 28:24-28). Still, this means of reaching out to Gentiles did not close the door to Jewish salvation, and in fact, Paul anticipates a "fullness" for the Jewish community as well. By fullness (πλήρωμα = that which fills or completes) Paul probably intends the full number of the Jews who would turn to Christ Jesus for salvation, since he later will use the very same expression to refer to the full number of Gentiles who turn to Christ for salvation (cf. 11:25).

Paul especially targets his words to his non-Jewish readers, since his calling as an apostle was specifically to reach Gentiles (11:13; cf. Ac. 9:15; 15:12-18; 22:21; 26:17-20; Ga.2:7-9). He wants them to understand that God's eternal purposes are not to exclude Jews from salvation. Hence, Gentiles must not suppose that they now

have some sort of priority. Instead, the extension of the gospel to the non-Jews works as an incentive for Jews to accept Jesus as the messiah, too (11:14). That God has turned away from the Jewish nation as a whole has been the means for inviting the whole world to become part of his intimate family, and by the same token, when Jewish folk realize what has happened and turn to God's messiah, it will be like they were raised from the dead (11:15)!

Paul employs a double illustration drawn from the laws regulating Israel's festivals (11:16). When at the festival of Weeks a portion of the harvest dough was offered to God, the part represented the whole (cf. Ex. 34:22; Lv. 23:17; Nu. 15:17-21; 28:26). The first-fruits dough was marked off as holy, implying that the entire harvest was holy. Similarly, at the end of summer, when the congregation of Israel celebrated the harvest by cutting leafy branches to create booths for camping, the cut branches represented the whole of the harvest (cf. Lv. 23:39-41; Dt. 16:13). Both the branches and the roots were holy. Paul's point is that Gentile Christians simply cannot write off the Jewish nation. The first-fruits—the Jewish remnant who believed in Christ Jesus—sanctify by extension their fellow Jews. (This does not necessarily mean that all Jews are saved, but somewhat along the lines of Paul's argument for the sanctity of children from a mixed marriage, the "holiness" of one parent means that the children of the union are legitimate, cf. 1 Co. 7:14). Similarly, the holy root of Israel, by which Paul probably means Abraham himself or at least the patriarchs, marks off as holy the entire community of Israel. Hence, let no Gentiles assume that they can simply exclude the Jews. Earlier, Paul has said nearly the same thing when he asked what advantage was there in being a Jew, and when readers might have expected him to say, "No advantage at all!", he instead said, "Much, in every way" (cf. 3:1-2)! If Paul's discussion has anything at all to do with the tension between Jews returning to Rome after the death of Claudius Caesar to a Roman church that was now thoroughly Gentile, it may well have been the case that some Gentiles resented the return of these Jewish Christians. Paul anticipates this resentment, and he urges his Gentile readers not to throw over their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Continuing with the branch metaphor, some of the branches of this holy root had been broken off, and in their place, a wild olive shoot had been grafted in among the other Jewish branches (11:17). By using the second person "you" (**σὺ**) after saying that he is addressing particularly his Gentile readers (cf. 11:13a), it is clear that Paul intends the wild olive branch to represent non-Jewish Christians. Gentile believers must not lord it over their Jewish counterparts, for it is the Jewish root that is primary (11:18). The breaking off of the unbelieving Jewish branches was due to their lack of faith, and the only way the non-Jewish wild branch could be sustained is through faith (11:19-20). God is not partisan, and lack of faith, whether on the part of Jew or Gentile, means rejection by God (11:21)! God is both kind and severe—kind

in allowing non-Jews to be joined to the native root and severe in breaking off unbelieving Jewish branches (11:22). Hence, the Gentile Christians must emulate this kindness by their acceptance of Jewish Christians into full fellowship. To do otherwise would be to disregard God's graciousness! Even more to the point, if the unbelieving Jews changed their minds about Christ Jesus, they, too, would be grafted back into the native root by God's grace (11:23). Surely if God went so far as to allow a wild branch into the family root, he would be even more willing to accept the natural branches back into their own family root (11:24)!

This entire root/branch metaphor expresses Paul's fundamental definition of what it means to be the chosen people of God, the true Israel. Earlier, he wrote that it was the ones led by God's Spirit who were truly his sons (cf. 8:14). Further, even Gentiles have been adopted into God's intimate family as heirs (cf. 8:15). God had determined in advance that he would have a people—foreknown, predestined to become like his very own Son, called, justified and glorified (cf. 8:29-30). Still, the parameters of God's family was not merely defined by pedigree, but rather, by faith, since it was the children of God's promise that were reckoned as the true sons of Abraham (cf. 9:8). Even those who once were "not a people" have now become God's people, and this includes both Jews and non-Jews (cf. 9:24-25). Hence, the true Israel—the true sons of God—are *both* the natural branches that believe as well as the wild branch that has been grafted in. There is only one people, and only one way. The promise of the blessing of salvation comes by faith and by grace, and as Paul said earlier, it is guaranteed to *all* Abraham's offspring, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The defining characteristic of God's people is faith itself (cf. 4:11b-12; 16-17, 23-24).

This brings Paul to his astounding conclusion, what he calls a "mystery", that is, the unveiling of God's long range plan concerning Jews and Gentiles.[158] This plan should take the wind out of any tendency for arrogance, especially on the part of Gentile Christians who might be tempted to dismiss Jewish Christians out of hand (11:25a). True, most Jews had rejected the messiahship of Jesus, and their unbelief had been judged by God who hardened their hearts. Still, it was only a part of the Jewish community that was so hardened.[159] (Other Jews had accepted Christ and belonged to the believing remnant.) This hardening of unbelieving Jews was God's way of making it possible for the Gentiles—at least all those who would believe (i.e.,

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[158] Paul's use of the term **μυστήριον** (= mystery), appearing some twenty-one times in his letters, does not so much refer to private knowledge to which only a few are privileged (as in the Greek mystery religions), but, to those future events ordained by God and disclosed by him in his own time, cf. P. O'Brien, "Mystery," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. Hawthorne and R. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), pp. 621-623.

[159] Paul's phrase **πώρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ** (= hardness from part to Israel) means a portion of the Jewish community had been hardened, not that all within the Jewish community had been partially hardened, cf. Nanos, pp. 263-264.

the full number)—to come into God's family (11:25b).[160] It was precisely through this hardening of unbelieving Jews and the consequent opening of the gospel to non-Jews that "all Israel will be saved." The opening words of 11:26, "and so" (**καὶ οὕτως**), mean that the statement "all Israel will be saved" is critically dependent upon everything he has just said. "All Israel" describes the same thing Paul has said earlier in his letter, when he spoke of Abraham being the father of "all who believe but have not been circumcised" as well as the father of "the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (cf. 4:11-12). "All Israel", then, means all God's children of faith, whether Jewish or non-Jewish.[161] The true Israel, the true remnant, the true seed of Abraham, and the true chosen people of God must be defined by faith in Jesus Christ. No other definition is possible. Even to those directly descended from the patriarchs, Paul assertion is: *Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel* (cf. 9:6)! But all who believe in Jesus Christ, Jew or non-Jew, are now included in God's people. This is the true Israel, or as Paul puts it, this is "all Israel." This hope of salvation is what had been promised long ago in Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9.

In the end, the Jewish community at large might seem to be the enemy of Christians, and indeed, proved so to be in much of Paul's missionary work (11:28a). Nonetheless, the people of Israel had been chosen for service as the descendents of the patriarchs, and this calling for service had not ended. In spite of their rejection of Jesus as the messiah, they still were serving God's long range purpose, and God still extended to them his love (11:28)![162] His calling to Israel in this strange role had not been rescinded (11:29)! The exchange was equal. The non-Jews, once in defiant rebellion against God, had now received the merciful call to become part of God's family (11:30). The Jews, even though in general rejection of the claims of Christ Jesus, could also receive God's merciful grace as they see his blessing upon Gentile Christians (11:31). All humans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, have been "bound over" or "shut up" (**συγκλείω** = to hem in, to imprison) in the jail of disobedience

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[160] In spite of Nanos' contention that the "fullness of the Gentiles" refers to the *commencement* of the gentile mission rather than its conclusion, his argument is not compelling, cf. Nanos, p. 272ff. Since Paul uses the term "fullness" to refer both to a Jewish fullness (11:12) and a Gentile fullness (11:25), it seems most likely he uses the term in the same way on both occasions. His first usage in 11:12 can hardly refer to the commencement of the Jewish mission.

[161] The dispensational notion that this passage refers to Jewish conversions during the great tribulation period after the church already has been raptured into heaven is so alien to the context of what Paul is saying that it defies description. On the other hand, the more liberal notion that "all Israel" means all Jews, whether with or without faith, flies in the face of the entire Roman letter.

[162] Paul's use of the term "election" as applicable to the unbelieving community of Israel should put to rest entirely the notion that Israel's election was to be defined strictly in terms of salvation as opposed to damnation. Rather, Israel was chosen by God to serve him, and such election does not guarantee to every Israelite salvation, cf. Klein, p. 43.

(cf. 3:9, 23), and to all, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike, is proclaimed the gospel of God's grace and mercy (11:32)!

Doxology (11:33-36)

To this wonderfully intricate, amazingly profound, and strikingly fair plan of God, Paul can only express awe! God's eternal purpose, once shrouded in dim and partial hints by the prophets, had now come to full fruition in the coming of Jesus, God's very own Son, the Messiah! With a collage of quotations from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11, Paul acclaims the inscrutability yet majesty of what God began so long ago and has now brought into clear focus. It is all by God's grace—it is all from him, it is all through him, and it is all to him that everything belongs!

The Ethics of the Gospel (12:1 - 15:13)

Paul's doxology at the conclusion of chapter 11 marks a transition in the Roman letter. If Paul's language about the salvation in Christ Jesus comes in both past and present tenses—what has been done ("we have been justified through faith," cf. 5:1) and what is now true ("we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand," cf. 5:2)—here Paul segues into the latter. He already has urged his readers that now, as baptized Christians in the new state of grace, they should "live a new life" (6:4). No longer are they "slaves to sin" (6:6), but they "live to God" (6:10), refusing to allow sin to creep back onto the throne (6:12). Free from sin, they now are "slaves to righteousness" (6:18). The ancient Torah, which was spiritual, holy, righteous and good (7:12, 14a), was unable to empower men and women to live up to its high calling (3:20). Instead, the Torah clearly defined sin, making it very sinful indeed (5:20a; 7:13). Now, however, the very Spirit of the one who raised Jesus Christ from the dead lives in them (8:11), and their lives are characterized by "life and peace" (8:6). The Holy Spirit leads them (8:14) and even prays through them so that they can intercede according to God's will (8:26-27). The ancient principles of the Torah are now fulfilled by those who live according to the Spirit (8:4). What the Torah could not do, God did in the sending of his Son (8:3). Now, both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians constitute the true Israel, the children of Abraham by faith (2:28-29; 4:16;9:6; 11:26). Since this is true, what then does it mean to live this new life in the Spirit? Paul's "therefore" (**σὖν**) at the beginning of chapter 12 sets up what is to follow by connecting it with everything the apostle has said so far.

The Worship of the True Israel (12:1-2)

The opening thesis for Paul's ethical section revolves around two concepts,

mercy and worship. In view of God's mercies, demonstrated in his love and grace to both Jew and non-Jew (11:30-32), Paul urgently appeals to his readers that they participate in the worship appropriate for members of the true community of Israel, the remnant of faith (12:1). The ancient pattern of worship, which was given to the community in the exodus (cf. 9:4b), pointed ahead to a fuller experience. Paul has developed this notion of fullness in more than one way. Just as the ancient ritual of physical circumcision pointed toward circumcision of a much more profound kind—circumcision of the heart (2:25-29)—so also, the sacrificial worship of the Tent of Meeting and Temple pointed toward worship of a much more profound kind. The ancient covenant with its emphasis on the old way of the written code had come to an end with the "death" of the husband (cf. 7:1-5). Now there was a new covenant (a new "marriage") in which believers could serve God in the "new way of the Spirit" (7:6; cf. Je. 31:31-34; Eze. 36:24-27). Paul's joining of the two words **λογικός** (= spiritual, rational) and **λατρεία** (= religious service, worship) is the key to everything that will follow based upon everything he already has said. The Christian life, lived in the Spirit, is itself the higher form of worship toward which all Paul's theology points. Rather than offering the sacrifice of animals, in which the worshiper identified himself with the animal for slaughter by laying his hands upon the head of the victim (cf. Lv. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4;), the Christian now offers his own body, not as a dead sacrifice, but as a living life. The old sacrifices are no longer appropriate, since Christ died "once for all" (6:10). Now, the Christian can now offer "the parts of his body to God as instruments of righteousness" (6:13). Both Jew and non-Jew now have experienced the trauma of disobedience, and both now are privileged to receive the offer of God's mercy (11:30-32). God will have mercy on them all!

On the basis of these truths, Paul gives his urgent appeal to the Romans to offer their lives as this living sacrifice to God. This is the spiritual worship appropriate to the higher circumcision and the new covenant. Above all, Christians must not allow the surrounding age[163] to press them into its mold. They belong to a new and redeemed community. They have been predestined to become like God's very own Son—foreknown, called, justified and glorified (cf. 8:29-30). In this true, spiritual worship their minds are to be transformed. Formerly, their minds were slaves to the dark side of Torah, crippled by the weakness of the flesh (cf. 7:23-25), hostile to God, and destined for death (cf. 8:6-7). Now, their minds can be renewed so that they "have their minds on what the Spirit desires" (12:2). The conventional Jewish view was that the Torah enabled the mind to control fleshly desires (cf. 4 Maccabees 2:6). Paul, by contrast, asserts that it is only the mind renewed by the Spirit that can "test and approve what God's will is"! The character of the renewed

[163] Paul's use of the term **αἰών** (= age, world) refers not only to the surrounding culture, but also to the old age which is now giving place to the new age.

mind is true spiritual discernment, and this new way of the Spirit is in accordance with God's "good, pleasing and perfect will".

The Body, the Gifts and the Graces of True Worship (12:3-21)

The specifics of Paul's appeal proceed out of God's graciousness. If God, in his grace, condescended to ungodly sinners in Christ Jesus, even to the point of the death of his Son (cf. 5:2, 8), then the only appropriate response for Christians is also to live in graciousness, resisting the urge toward self-aggrandizement (12:3a). Their self-assessment should be in terms of the measure of faith God has given equally to all. They are not to measure themselves against each other, but rather, against the yardstick of faith itself (12:3). It is not, "Am I better than you?", but rather, "Am I attaining to the full measure of the calling of faith that every believer has received" (cf. Ep. 4:7, 13).

Paul's concern is for the unity of the Christian community, and to this end he employs a favorite metaphor, the one body with its many members and functions (12:4). The body is the community, and the members and their functions are God's gifts to the community (12:5). Although similar, Paul's instruction here differs somewhat from his advice to the Corinthians, where he also speaks of the relationship between the body and its gifts (1 Co. 12-14). There, he was preoccupied with specific gifts that were being abused (tongues and prophecy), while here he has no such compelling need. Hence, the discussion in Romans only mentions prophesy in passing and does not mention tongues at all. The Romans listing of spiritual gifts is more general.

God has gifted all the various individuals in the Christian community according to his grace (12:6a). No one is left out. Still, each Christian must assess himself or herself with respect to "the proportion of the faith", that is to say, each member must seek to employ his gift within the parameters of the faith of the whole community (12:6b).[164] Paul's gift list, as with most of his various lists, is suggestive rather than exhaustive. He specifically mentions prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, contributing to others' needs, leadership and showing mercy (12:6b-8). Since none of these gifts are explained in detail, the reader must assume that Paul expects the meaning to be more-or-less obvious, and in most cases this is so. Probably the gift most obscure for modern Christians is prophecy. Taking Paul's

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[164] Even though the NIV inserts the word "his", making the statement read, "in proportion to his faith", thus suggesting that the prophetic gift is in proportion to the amount of faith that the prophet himself has, the Greek text simply reads "the faith" not "his faith." N. T. Wright may well be on the right track by saying this addition is unwarranted, and what Paul has in mind is not the amount of faith some particular individual may have, but rather, is the "proportional relationship between the Christian faith as a whole and what individual prophets might say", cf. *NIB* (2002) X.711. If so, then what Paul instructs is that the content of a prophet's message must not fall outside the received faith of the community.

definition from 1 Corinthians 14:3, we probably should understand prophecy to consist of a message to the congregation to strengthen, encourage and comfort. As such, prophecy is essentially exhortation, and it should be exercised in proportion to the accepted faith of the whole community. Whatever a person's gift, that member of the body should now use it for the benefit of the whole, since as Paul puts it, "each member belongs to all the others". Spiritual gifts are not primarily for personal enrichment; rather, they are primarily for the benefit of the community.

There is, of course, a relationship between such gifts and the idea of grace within the community. In the first place, the very word "gift" (χάρισμα) is integrally related to the word "grace" (χάρις). Spiritual gifts are gifts freely and graciously given—they are favors bestowed.[165] If gifts are functions, the attitude behind those functions is equally important. In his Corinthian correspondence, Paul followed the same paradigm, first discussing the gifts themselves (1 Co. 12), and then anchoring them to the attitudes that drive Christian behavior (1 Co. 13). Here, he speaks of the motivations of love, honor, zeal, joy, patience, and the desire to share with others. As is apparent, all these Christians graces are the polar opposites of self-centeredness. Love—the most fundamental attitude of all—must be genuine, not contrived. Hatred is reserved only for what is evil (12:9). All that is good must be embraced. Devotion to each other in the Christian family, deference to each other as more worthy of honor than oneself, diligence,[166] spiritual eagerness,[167] and service to the Lord—these are the qualities to be expected in the true Israel's worship (12:10-11). Believers should be repositories of joy as they anticipate God's future, patient during the present distresses, dependable in their prayers, generous in sharing with the other members of the Christian community who are distressed, and willing to open their own homes to those in need (12:12-13).

The list of Christian graces goes on, not only within the Christian community but in response to those outside it as well. The proper response to persecution is blessing, not cursing (12:14).[168] The proper response to moments of celebration is to join in; the proper response to grief is empathy with those who grieve (12:15). Harmony, even with those outside the Christian community, is to be pursued (12:16a). Pride of class is unworthy of the true Israel who has been saved by the very

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[165] *BAG* (1979) p. 878.

[166] Lit., "not slothful in zeal"

[167] Lit., "burning in spirit"

[168] By contrast, the Jewish heroes of the old order went to their deaths with curses: "you accursed wretch", "for you there will be no resurrection to life", "keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants", "do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God", "you will not escape the hands of God…you unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men…you have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God" (2 Maccabees 7:9, 14, 17, 19, 31, 34-35). One immediately recalls, by contrast, the prayer of the first Christian martyr, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (cf. Ac. 7:60).

mercy of God, so Christians should be willing to associate with those whose social positions are often regarded as inferior (12:16b).

All these responses depend directly upon the teachings of Jesus (e.g., Mt. 5:38-48; Lk. 6:27-36). While such admonitions are not direct quotations, as least not in the form we see them in the gospels, it is hard to believe that Paul did not have in mind these very same teachings of Jesus that were by this time part of the oral tradition of the church. Personal vengeance is out, and the desire to behave judiciously in the eyes of the outsider is in (12:17). Every effort should be made to live peacefully with those outside the Christian circle (12:18). To be sure, there is evil in the world and there are evil people who do evil things. Still, God's wrath, as Paul has said earlier, is revealed from heaven against all human wickedness (cf. 1:18), so Christians must let God be God and not try to preempt his divine role by taking matters into their own hands (12:19), just as the Torah advises (cf. Dt. 32:35). Instead of seeking reprisals, Christians should follow the wisdom of the ancients: they should feed their enemies, thus "heaping burning coals" on their heads (12:20; cf. Pro. 25:21-22).[169] Finally, the member of the true Israel must not allow evil to gain the upper hand, but instead, must defeat evil by goodness (12:21).

Christians Under Secular Authority (13:1-7)

The changed landscape between the theocracy of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the secular Roman Empire of Paul's world created considerable resentment among the Jews. In Palestine, especially, Rome was perceived as an occupying force, and both in the 60s and 130s AD, the Jews would stage armed rebellions against this occupation. Jesus had warned them that such an effort would be unsuccessful, and indeed it was! During the tenure of Claudius Caesar, the Jews had been expelled from Rome due to riots connected with "Chrestus", a name that probably is a misspelled reference to Christ.[170] The relationship of Christians to the Roman state, particularly because they also were citizens of the kingdom of God, was an important subject for anyone who desired to live out the ethics of Christianity in the real world. Just how should Christians relate to the power of the state embodied in pagan Rome? Already, Paul has urged his readers, on the basis of the teachings of Jesus, about how they should respond to persecution, evil, and personal enemies (cf. 12:14-21). What he said there is entirely consistent with what he says here, that is,

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[169] This advice in the Proverbs comes as the climax of a series of admonitions toward the care of one's enemies (cf. 24:11, 12, , 17, 18, 29). The metaphor of "coals of fire" probably refers to the pangs resulting from shameful antagonism, cf. D. Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction & Commentary [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), p. 160.

[170] Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 5.25.4. For an examination of this reference and why most scholars are confident that it refers to Jesus Christ, see M. Harris, *3 Crucial Questions About Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 21-24.

that believers should avoid a posture of antagonism. What he said earlier about persons he now says about institutions of authority.

He urges his readers to voluntarily submit themselves to the secular authorities (13:1a).[171] By saying that no authority exists except what God has established, Paul does not therefore make God vouch for the Roman Empire (13:1b). Rather, he intends that the principle of government is itself ordained by God. Government is given by God to maintain social order. To rebel against established authority is to rebel against what God has ordained, and the consequent penal actions toward the disobedient are no more than what should be expected (13:2). The power of government against law-breakers is no threat against those who keep the law, but against those who do not, it is a potent force (13:3). Those who serve in secular government, whether they know it or not, are performing a function that God ordained, and in this role, they serve God's purposes (13:4a; cf. Is. 10:5; 45:1). Their power extends even to the ordering of executions for capital crimes (13:4b), where "the sword" refers to the power of capital punishment. Hence, voluntary submission to the governing authorities is not optional. It is necessary, both because there are severe consequences if one breaks the law, and also, because Christians should live by a good conscience (13:5). A good conscience could hardly be maintained by one who defies the social order that God ordained.

Paul's statements here do not address a number of issues. First, it is not entirely clear whether Paul's seeming optimism regarding the Roman government is in any way related to the fact that the Jews, once expelled from Rome, now had been able to return upon the death of Claudius. Further, while his view of Rome government is certainly compatible with the attitude expressed in 1 Peter 2:13-17, it is markedly different than the negativism expressed in the Book of Revelation, which portrays Rome as in league with the devil (cf. Rv. 13:1; 17:9; 18:4-8). What Paul might have said had he known of the imperial persecutions that later would send many Christians to their deaths, we simply cannot know, but in any case, in this passage he does not envision anything that might resemble civil disobedience. If, in fact, Paul's oblique reference in 2 Thessalonians to "the restrainer" has anything to do with the role of secular government (cf. 2 Th. 2:7), then he certainly believed that this restraining force would be removed so that the eschatological person of lawlessness could be revealed (2 Th. 2:8-12). The whole problem of unjust capital punishment is also without any comment. However one is to answer these extended questions, and Christians have debated them for centuries, it at least is clear that Paul did not give his readers any license for anarchy, even if in the name of God. His

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[171] Paul uses the middle voice of the verb **ὑποτάσσω** (= to subordinate, to be subject). Middle voice verbs in Greek, by definition, suggest a voluntary act, since they describe the subject as participating in the outcome, cf. H. Dana and J. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto, Canada: Macmillan, 1955), p. 157.

solution to overcoming evil is consistent throughout; the Christian overcomes evil with good!

Consequently, it follows that Christian citizens in Rome are obliged to pay taxes, which in turn support the government (13:6). Paul uses two phrases (13:7), and they probably refer to the Roman system of both direct and indirect taxation.[172] Additionally, their responsibility toward government is not only material but also attitudinal. Respect and honor are also required. Paul himself lived out this very principle not much later than the writing of this letter. When facing the magistrates of Rome in Caesarea Maritima, he certainly was bold to defend himself (Ac. 24:17-21; 25:8), but at the same time, he frankly confessed that if he were guilty, he stood ready to bear his just punishment (Ac. 25:10-11).

The True Fulfillment of Moses' Law (13:8-10)

Finally, Paul reaches a conclusion toward which he has been pointing since early in the letter. At the beginning, Paul argued that "those who seek glory, honor and immortality", that is, "those who do good", would be given eternal life (cf. 2:7,10). Further, he insisted that those who "do" the Torah would be justified (cf. 2:13) and that non-Jews without the Torah could become a Torah for themselves if the requirements for which the Torah aimed were written on their hearts (cf. 2:15). Has, in fact, anyone kept the Torah? No! Paul went on to argue that no one has kept the Torah. Both Jews and Gentiles alike have fallen short (cf. 3:9-20). Since no one actually has kept the Torah, no one can be declared righteous by observing the Torah. Hence, God has revealed a righteousness apart from Torah, a righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 3:21-22). The marriage to the former "husband" (the covenant of Torah) has ended with the death of the spouse. Now, a new covenant of marriage is possible (the new covenant) to a new husband (cf. 7:1-6a). That new spouse is Jesus Christ, and the new way of the new marriage is the "newness of the Spirit", not the "oldness of letter" (cf. 7:6b). The Holy Spirit bringing the life of Jesus has set the believer free from the Torah leading to sin and death (cf. 8:2). What the Torah could not do, God did in the sending of his Son (cf. 8:3), "in order that the ordinance of the Torah might be fully met in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (cf. 8:4). Hence, there are two ways, the way of righteousness by Torah observance and the way of righteousness by faith (cf. 10:5-6). Only the latter, however, is the way forward. What, then, is the way "according to the Spirit"? If the Torah is now written in human hearts in God's new covenant, how does this affect the behavior of Christians?

Paul begins with the idea of debt or obligation. Given that he has just spoken

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[172] N. Wright, *NIB* (2002) X.721.

of one's "debt" to the government, it is easy to miss Paul's point and assume that he still is speaking only of money. The following context, in fact, is against this notion. Paul's concern is not that Christians avoid financial debt (though this may very well be a laudable thing in itself), but that they not adopt the posture of indebtedness to Torah intensification. The debt of Torah is the perspective that a person "owes" obedience to the Torah in order to achieve righteousness. Torah intensification was a typically Jewish way of paying this debt. Paul, to the contrary, says only one debt alone is now owed, the debt of gratitude for God's grace expressed in love toward others (13:8).[173] This debt is not something one pays in order to be declared righteousness, but rather, the debt one pays in view of the inexhaustible mercy of God in the coming of Jesus Christ. Those who love "the other [person]" have fulfilled the ultimate intent of the Torah—the purpose of "bringing life" (cf. 7:10).

Paul consciously echoes Jesus' teaching about loving one's neighbor as oneself (cf. Mt. 19:16-19; 22:35-39//Mk. 12:28-34//Lk. 10:25-37), and further, his teaching that all the Torah and the Prophets hang upon the two greatest of the commandments (Mt. 22:40). The decalogue, of course, was the heart of the Torah, and Paul names several of the ten commandments by way of illustration, concluding that all of them—and, in fact, all 613 commandments of the Torah ("if any other commandment")—are summed up in a single word, to love one's neighbor as oneself (13:9; cf. Lv. 19:18, 34). This kind of love, as expressed in the Torah and reaffirmed here, is not primarily an emotive feeling but rather a choice of behavior, and Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan reinforces this understanding (Lk. 10:29-37). It is to act in the interests of the other, to be beneficial to the other, or to be of use to the other.[174] This kind of love does nothing to "the other" that would be harmful, and when one follows this path, love actually achieves the righteous behavior aimed at by the Torah (13:10).

Living in the Last Days (13:11-14)

It was the conclusion of the writers of the New Testament that "the last days", anticipated by Israel's prophets, had been inaugurated with the coming of Jesus the messiah.[175] It is this conclusion that Paul assumes when he speaks of "knowing the

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[173] Lit., "To no one owe anything except to love the other", and by "the other" Paul means persons other than oneself. Some commentators have suggested that "the other" refers to the other law, that is, the second of the two great commandments (i.e., to love one's neighbor as oneself), but this interpretation seems unlikely, cf. Bruce, p. 240.

[174] See the insightful discussion in A. Malamat, "'Love Your Neighbor as Yourself', What It Really Means," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1990), pp. 50-51.

[175] For an extensive treatment of this conclusion, see my work: D. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions about the Last Days* (rpt. United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1998), pp. 29-68.

time"—that it is now the hour to be raised out of sleep.[176] The imagery of arising in the morning suggests that Paul believes the long night of the present age is drawing to a close. The triumph of final salvation is close at hand (13:11-12a). Later, he will say in a similar fashion that the crushing of Satan, first anticipated in the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, is near (cf. 16:20). Of course, Christians live in the interim between Christ's resurrection and return, and they do not know how long that interval may be. Nevertheless, their constant attitude is that the return of Christ is near. The Qumran community envisioned a final conflict between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, a terrific political war between the Romans and the pure Israelites.[177] Paul has no such vision here. Rather, he focuses on how Christians should behave as they await the fulfillment of Christ's promise. In the New Testament, eschatological hope always serves to stimulate ethical behavior in the present, and so it does here. The "works of darkness", what elsewhere Paul describes by the metaphors of drowsiness and drunkenness (cf. 1 Th. 5:7), must be cast aside. The weapons of light, what earlier Paul called the "weapons of righteousness" (cf. 6:13), must be taken up (13:12b). Christians are in a war until the end, to be sure, but their weapons, as Paul says in his other letters, are not the conventional tools of worldly power struggles (cf. 2 Co. 10:4; Ep. 6:11ff.).

Therefore, the imperative is to "behave decently" with the sort of behavior that is clearly visible in full daylight (13:13). Christians must shun the kinds of behaviors that typically happen after dark—wild parties, inebriation, bedding those who are not one's spouse,[178] and all the other excesses that characterize the prevailing culture. Further, they must refuse to allow strife and jealousy a foothold in their lives. Instead, they should "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ. Like taking off a filthy garment and putting on a clean one, they should make the pure life of Jesus their own (13:14a; cf. Ga. 3:27; Ep. 4:24-25; Col. 3:9-10). Especially, they must not become preoccupied with gratifying the strong desires of the flesh, the arena of their human weakness (13:14b; cf. Ga. 5:19-21).

Mutual Concern Between the Weak and the Strong (14:1-23)

Paul's final exhortation with regard to the ethics of the gospel concerns a polarization between two factions in the Roman church that he distinguishes as "the one who is weak in the faith" (14:1) as opposed to "we, the strong" (15:1). Obviously, Paul personally identifies himself with the latter, since he uses the second

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[176] The noun καιρός (= point in time) refers to a particular period as opposed to the long chronology of successive periods, cf. O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, rev. ed., trans. F. Filson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 39.

[177] For an English translation of the *War Scroll*, see M. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr., & E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 150-172.

[178] Lit. "not in beds"

person plural form "we" (ἡμεῖς). How Paul knows of this polarization is not clear. Is this something he simply suspects, perhaps based on the logic that if many Christian Jews had returned to Rome after the death of Claudius Caesar there was bound to be such tension? Was some definite information communicated to him by a third party? We know, for instance, that Paul had some indirect knowledge of the Roman church through Priscilla and Aquila (cf. Ac. 18:1-3). In 1 Corinthians, he says he actually knows such information about the Corinthians and directly names the party who communicated with him (cf. 1 Co. 1:11). Here, there is no such specific information, so the reader cannot be sure. Nevertheless, it seems clear enough that Paul addresses what he believes to be a real, not merely hypothetical, situation.

Of more particular importance is the identification of these two factions. Who are "the weak", and who are "the strong". The general context seems to suggest that both are Christians.[179] Both are accepted by Christ Jesus (cf. 14:3b; 15:7). Both serve the same Lord (cf. 14:4, 6, 8). In this sense, they both are "brothers" (cf. 14:10, 13, 15). Both belong to the kingdom of God (cf. 14:17-18). Both are called to unity in following Christ Jesus (cf. 14:5-6). At the same time, the polarization may not be so easily demarcated as simply between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians, since terms like "Jew" and "Gentile" and "circumcised" and "uncircumcised" are only conspicuous by their absence in the entire discussion up until 15:8. At the same time, Paul's comments do seem to relate to issues of Jewish observance, since they concern vegetarianism (14:2), the observance of holy days (14:5), and whether or not a Christian can drink certain beverages (14:17, 21).

The best solution seems to be that Paul addresses a situation in which Jewish cultural observances played a central role, observances that could have been adopted by either Jewish or Gentile Christians. Some non-Jewish Christians might have been intimidated into kosher observances along with Jewish Christians, and by the same token, other Jewish Christians might have been swayed from their traditions by the non-Jewish Christians. In either case, Paul's advice would directly apply. The "weak", then, were those Christians who for conscience sake were more rigorous in observing kosher laws and Jewish holy days. The "strong" were those Christians for whom kosher laws and holy days were non-essentials. Those "weak in faith" were not Christians who only believed part of the gospel, but rather, Christians who though they believed the gospel had not yet realized its full implications. The "strong" were not morally superior Christians, but rather, Christians who fully had

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[179] To be sure, Mark Nanos has argued that "the weak" are Jews in the synagogue who had rejected the messiahship of Jesus Christ, while "the strong" were Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, cf. pp. 85-165. In his viewpoint, this entire discussion was evangelistically driven so that the sensitive behavior of the Christians toward non-Christians Jews would be a tool for bringing them to accept Jesus as their messiah. As innovative as this interpretation is, it requires a good deal of special pleading, and on the whole, the argument is unconvincing.

realized the implications of the gospel but were in danger of judgmentalism and spiritual pride.

In the first section of his comments, Paul emphasized that if both sides have the same Lord, who died and rose again for their salvation and would judge them at the end of the age, then in the meantime they should receive each other[180] and refuse to pass judgment on each other. The "strong" must accept those whom they believe to be "weak", declining to assess each other's spiritual condition on the basis of disputable issues (14:1). It had long been a practice of many observant Jews living in Gentile cultures to practice vegetarianism in order to avoid accidentally eating non-kosher food, or worse, eating food that had been dedicated to pagan deities (cf. Da. 1; Tobit 1:10-12; Judith 12:1-2; 1 Maccabees 1:62-63; 2 Maccabees 5:27).[181] In all probability, the issue of vegetarianism here followed along similar lines (14:2). Those for whom the kosher laws of Torah still carried significant weight may well have resorted to vegetarianism as a safety measure. Others, perhaps those who had heard of Jesus' teaching that "all foods were clean" (cf. Mk. 7:19), had no such scruples.[182] The salient point was that neither the one who was sensitive to kosher issues nor the one who was not so sensitive should disparage his brother or sister on such grounds (14:3). If God accepted men and women on the basis of their faith, then the observance of kosher laws was beside the point. No one may reject those whom God has accepted, as Peter discovered earlier (cf. Ac. 10:15, 28; 11:9)! As servants of Jesus Christ, all believers belonged to him as their master—and only the master had the right to pronounce judgment (14:4a). In fact, since they belonged to Christ, Paul was confident that they would be saved, or as he says, they "will stand" (14:4b)!

What was true of kosher issues was equally true of sacred days and seasons. The Torah specified various days as "holy", including the weekly Sabbath, the pilgrim festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Booths, and so forth (14:5a). Paul does not have any apparent resistance to those who want to observe the special days designated in the Torah, and in fact, he himself seemed amenable to recognizing them (cf. Ac. 20:16). However, he would, as he shows elsewhere, resist emphatically the observance of such days as a way to earn favor with God (cf. Ga. 4:10-11; Col.

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[180] The verb προσλαμβάνω means to receive, or accept in one's society, home or circle of acquaintances, cf. *BAG* (1979) p. 717.

[181] In some parts of the empire, Josephus indicates that food concessions were granted to Diaspora Jews so that suitable food not violating kosher practices was available to them. In Sardis, for instance, Jews were actually authorized to oversee the meat market, cf. B. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 287-293. Such measures notwithstanding, the issue of kosher food was a regular problem.

[182] The relationship of Mark's Gospel to the Roman church is beyond the scope of this study, but Clement of Alexandria, near the end of the 2nd century, cited Rome as the place where Mark wrote this gospel, cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14.6. If this information is accepted, it makes sense of the parallel between "he declared all foods are clean" (Mk. 7:19) and "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself" (Ro. 14:14).

2:16). Still, in the present case, he takes the neutral position that every Christian must come to his own conclusion (14:5b). By "fully persuaded" Paul seems to mean that each person had the right to come to a serious personal decision out of reverence for God, since the observance of holy days, like the observance of kosher laws, was an act of thanksgiving to God (14:6). On the other hand, the one who did not set apart holy days or who did not observe kosher laws also refrained out of the context of God's gift of freedom in Christ (14:6). By putting both observance and non-observance in the category of "thanksgiving", Paul effectively extracts it from the category of obligation. No longer is it a case of legalism ("you must do this"); it now is an issue of gratitude ("you can show thanks in more than one way").

The inferential "for" (γὰρ) in 14:7 connects Paul's advice to the reasoning underlying his advice. In the Christian fellowship, no one can remain isolated from the rest of the community, or to borrow the words of John Donne, "No man is an island, entire of itself." (Of course, Donne was speaking of the human race, while Paul refers to the community of Christ, but the metaphor holds true.) For the Christian, even life and death cannot separate one from God (14:8; cf. 8:39), and therefore, Christians should not be separated from each other. The death and resurrection of Jesus meant that he is Lord over both dead and living (14:9), and if his lordship already has been established in the foundational work of Good Friday and Easter, Christians should not exhibit judgmentalism over debatable matters (14:10a). Christ Jesus is the Judge of all, and all will appear before him (14:10b-11; cf. Is. 49:18; 45:23; 2 Co. 5:10; Phil. 2:10). Every Christian will appear before Christ's judgment seat, and each will be individually accountable for his or her behavior in this life (14:12; cf. 2:1-16).[183] Of course, Paul already has assured his readers that as believers they will not be condemned (cf. 8:1). They have been acquitted in advance of the last judgment (cf. 5:1). At the same time, Paul does not empty this judgment of its serious import, for as he argues elsewhere, any Christian, though not condemned, may have his or her behavior judged to be worthwhile or worthless (cf. 1 Co. 3:12-14).

If anyone wanted to make a judgment, he should make the judgment not to trip up his brother or sister (14:13).[184] Here, Paul may be alluding to Jesus' teaching about restraining judgment (cf. Mt. 7:1-5), and in the next saying he is almost certainly

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[183] Paul certainly was familiar with the Greco-Roman βῆμα (= judgment seat, judicial bench). He once stood before Gallio's βῆμα in Corinth (cf. Ac. 18:12ff.), and in fact, archaeologists have exposed this very structure in the Corinthian excavations, cf. V. Furnish, "Corinth in Paul's Time—What Can Archaeology Tell us?" *BAR* (May/June 1988) pp. 19-20. The notion by some dispensationalists that the *bema* was for rewards only and never used as a judicial bench is incorrect on historical grounds, contra D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 220.

[184] There is a play on words with the double use of the verb κρίνω (= to judge). Lit., Paul says, "Therefore, let us judge one another no longer, but judge this, rather, not to set up a stumbling-block or an offense to [our] brother."

recalling the teaching of Jesus when he recalls the Lord's implied teaching that all foods were clean (14:14a; cf. Mk. 7:19). By saying that he has arrived at this position by way of being "in the Lord Jesus," Paul intends that his frame of reference for such debatable matters was not now the tradition of the fathers but the new perspective offered by Christ himself. Still, Paul also leaves room for the individual conscience, and he refuses to counsel anyone to go against conscience (14:14b). The fact that two believers might have different sensitivities of conscience about a matter means that if they act in love, neither can dismiss the scruples of the other (14:15).

Earlier, Paul has said that Christians should owe nothing except the debt of love to each other (cf. 13:8a), and in fact, it is in "loving the other" that one fulfills the Torah (13:8b). Sensitivity to the scruples of others, even if one may not share those same scruples, is an act of love, while dismissing their scruples as frivolous might cause them a terrible spiritual injury. By using the verb **ἀπόλυμι** (= destroy, ruin), Paul seems to be referring to something much more serious than petty differences over trifles. It may be that he envisions a believer succumbing to idolatry, since meat sold in the open market often had been dedicated to a pagan deity, and if so, then such idolatry would compromise the believer's very loyalty to Jesus Christ. Even though a "strong" Christian might feel at liberty with respect to certain behaviors, he must never allow what he considers acceptable to be perceived as an accommodation to evil (14:16). In any case, God's kingdom is not about legalistic details, even the ones concerning kosher food and drink (14:17). Rather, it is about the righteousness believers have received as God's gift (cf. 5:17), peace that comes from being justified in advance of the last judgment (cf. 5:1), and joy in the Holy Spirit that indwells each Christian (cf. 8:11). Earlier, Paul urged that those who live "in the flesh" cannot please God (cf. 8:8). Instead, it is the one who lives a life of worship in the new covenant who is well-pleasing to God (cf. 12:1). The one who lives in the realm of righteousness, peace and joy, therefore, pleases God and, in fact, wins the approval of others (14:18).

Paul, therefore, urges the Romans to pursue "the things of peace" and "the things of building up one another" (14:19). Never should Christians undermine God's work for the sake of kosher practices (14:20a). To be sure, all food is clean, and Jesus said so! At the same time, to use one's Christian liberty in a way that caused the moral downfall of someone else would be patently wrong (14:20b). It would be better to become vegetarian oneself—or whatever else was necessary—in order to avoid causing a brother or sister to fail in their faith (14:21).[185] At a private

[185] Paul's metaphor of "stumbling" and "falling", if we are to judge by how he uses it elsewhere (e.g., 9:32-33; 11:9-11), must surely refer to failed faith in some sense. As such, this passage should not be used by believers to demand conformity to their various personal idiosyncrasies. Sometimes, when someone says, "You must do this to please God," it really only means, "You must do this to please me."

level, Christians could come to their own conclusions about kosher practices so long as they did not transgress their own consciences (14:22a). Such a person, who came to his own decision with a clear conscience, would be blessed (14:22b). However, conscience is always a crucial factor. The one who transgresses his own conscience feels the weight of guilt (14:23a). Conscientious doubts are not in themselves sinful, but behavior that goes against conscience, which by definition cannot be an act of faith, *is* sin (14:23b)!

The Ethical Conclusion (15:1-13)

It is apparent that Paul's advice to the weak and the strong carries over into chapter 15, despite the chapter division. He begins his ethical climax of the Roman letter by saying, "So we, the strong, ought to bear the weaknesses of the ones not strong" (15:1a).[186] The Christian ethic, as Paul already urged, is to show love to the "other" (cf. 13:8). Self-gratification and building up one's neighbor, at least in this case, are mutually exclusive (15:1b-2). The responsibility of the strong is not mere tolerance, but more to the point, it is to build up and strengthen those "not strong". Christ himself is the model, and in his submission to the cross and its ignominy, he accepted the sting of insult, just as did the ancient sufferer in Psalm 69:9. Such ancient words were recorded for our benefit as well, to strengthen our capacity for endurance and to encourage us not to abandon our hope (15:4; cf. 1 Co. 10:11). From the ancient prayer in Psalm 69, Paul lapses into the language of prayer himself, interceding for the unity of the church (15:5). If God had grafted a wild (Gentile) olive shoot into the native (Jewish) root, and by doing so, had incorporated all who believe into the true Israel so that all Israel would be saved (cf. 11:17, 26), then there must no longer be an ethnic barrier between God's people. Both Jew and Gentile alike should be able to confess their faith with a single voice so that God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, might be glorified (15:6).

With the same language of acceptance he used in 14:1, Paul now urges the Roman Christians to accept each other in the same way Christ accepted them (15:7a). Since by God's mercies to both Jew and Gentile (cf. 11:30-32) the true Israel of God had now entered into a new dimension of spiritual worship (cf. 12:1), mutual acceptance of each other was the form of that worship that would effect true praise to God (15:7b). The coming of the Messiah was also the coming of the Servant; the royal imagery of David's line had been joined to the suffering imagery of the Servant in Isaiah (Is. 40-55). The Messiah came as a Servant of the circumcised community to confirm the ancient promises to Abraham that in his posterity all the families of the

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[186] The NIV's "the failings of the weak" may be overcooked, where the translation "failings" tends to disconnect the sentence from what Paul already has said about the weak and raises the suggestion of moral failure. Moral failure is hardly what Paul intends by "the ones not strong".

earth would be blessed (15:8-9a; cf. Ge. 12:1-3). In these few words, Paul ties together the dominant theme of the letter (cf. 1:3-4). This had been God's purpose all along. The natural posterity of the patriarchs was never an end in itself. God's corporate choice of ancient Israel to serve his purpose was so that, in the end, the mercies of salvation could be given to both Jew and Gentile. With a collage of passages, Paul drives home the point that this was in view all along (15:9b-12; 2 Sa.22:50//Ps. 18:49; Dt. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Is. 11:10). Together, the nations along with Israel could join in the single worship of the one God.

Paul concludes with a final prayer of intercession for hope, joy and peace, these graces of the Holy Spirit that characterize the full community of "all Israel" (15:13; cf. 11:26). The Roman Christians might live in the power center of the empire, but the "root of Jesse" had risen, just as the ancient prophets promised, and he would rule the nations! This, and not the other, is the Christian hope!

Paul's Future Plans and Greetings to the Church (15:14 - 16:27)

The closing of the Roman letter brings Paul back to one of the things he mentioned in his opening, that in his ministry he was "obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks" and that he was eager to preach the gospel in Rome (cf. 1:14-15). Now, he will add that he hopes not only to preach in Rome but also beyond Rome to the west.

Paul's Travel Plans (15:14-33)

Paul's desire to come to Rome was not due to any perceived deficiency in the Romans' understanding of the gospel. He fully believed in the competency of his Christian Roman colleagues (15:14). He did not regard his letter, as intense as it was, to be something alien, but rather, to be a reminder of what they already knew (15:15). Still, it was only fair if he were to ask for their support in a mission further to the west that they should have from his own hand the emphasis that was peculiarly his. In particular, this emphasis was his role as a minister to the non-Jews. His preaching of the gospel was on the order of a priestly role, the offering of a sacrifice so that the non-Jewish nations also could offer an acceptable sacrifice to God, a sacrifice made holy by the Holy Spirit (15:16). Earlier, he said that the worship of the true people of God was in offering themselves as a living sacrifice (cf. 12:1), and his words here echo that teaching. Yes, in the true Israel under the new covenant there are priests and sacrifices, but they are not the same as in the old form of worship associated with tent and temple. In this new form of worship, Paul can boldly "boast" of his priestly

role (15:17).[187] Of himself personally, however, he refuses to boast, other than about what Christ has done by choosing him as his servant in the cause of leading non-Jews to obedience (15:18a).[188] His ministry in word and action—in powerful signs and miracles—was prompted by the Holy Spirit (15:18b-19a).

In his mission, Paul had completed his work all the way from Jerusalem in Syria-Palestina to Illyricum on the north-western coast above the Grecian peninsula (15:19b). This is an astounding claim! On the face of it, we can hardly believe that by saying he had "fulfilled the gospel" he means that he had preached in every city between Jerusalem and the Adriatic Sea. Rather, Paul's pattern seems to have been to establish centers within the various Roman administrative districts from which the Christian message might spread into the outlying areas.[189] This work was now complete. To be sure, in the record of Acts and Paul's other letters, we remain uninformed about any visit to Illyricum. However, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and Paul might very well have visited Illyricum. The most likely point would have been between the end of his ministry in Ephesus and his last trip to Jerusalem, when he decided to go back through Macedonia (Ac. 20:1-6). If this is the same as what he mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, then Paul may have spent as much as a year and a half in Macedonia and Achaia, and during that time, he may have reached the borders of Illyricum.[190] His goal had always been to preach in areas where the Christian message had not yet penetrated. Paul was an apostle-missionary, not a pastor of established churches (15:20). He took as his motto the passage from the beginning of the Fourth Servant Song, which speaks of the mission of God's Servant to those who had not yet heard (15:21; cf. Is. 52:15). Because he had been preoccupied with this mission, Paul had not yet visited the Christians in Rome (15:22). Why Paul uses the verb "hindered" and modifies it with "many [times]" is unclear. It sounds as though, in spite of his basic pattern of preaching only where the gospel had not yet reached, he had attempted to come west previously. His statement in 1:13 reinforces this interpretation. The circumstances, however, are completely unknown.

At last, Paul now hopes that his way will be clear to come westward, particularly since he sensed his apostolic-missionary work was complete in the east (15:23). However, his ultimate goal was not Rome per se but Spain, and after a short visit, he hoped that the Christians in Rome would assist him in his mission to the far

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[187] The Greek text τὰ πρός τὸν θεόν (= the things pertaining to God) is a technical phrase for priestly service, as demonstrated by a comparison with Hebrews 2:17, which contains the identical wording.

[188] Once again, as in 1:5, Paul sees no tension between obedience and faith. There, he could speak of the "obedience of faith", while here he can speak simply of "obedience".

[189] R. Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 10-17.

[190] So F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 317-318.

west of the empire (15:24). Would Paul then have proceeded even further? Would he have gone to Britain, which had very recently come under the empire's borders? Would he have circled around the northern rim of the African continent? Such possibilities are tantalizing but entirely speculative.

Before coming to Rome, however, Paul had one final responsibility in the east. For some time he had taken up the task of collecting funds from the churches in Macedonia, Achaia and Galatia for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem (15:25-26; cf. 1 Co. 16:1-4; 2 Co. 8-9). Due to their heritage in ancient Israel and God's covenants, Paul could actually speak of this collection as something "owed" by the Gentile churches (15:27). Once this gift had been delivered (and in the ancient world such gifts usually were carried personally, since there was no imperial postal system available to the public), Paul would be free to embark on his mission to the western side of the empire (15:28). He could then visit the Roman Christians en route (15:29). It is obvious that Paul had no inkling of what would happen when he arrived in Jerusalem. He did, indeed, offer the gift to the Jerusalem Christians (cf. Ac. 24:17). Still, after an arrest and two years incarceration at Caesarea Maritima (cf. Ac. 24:27), it was a long time before he was to see Rome, and then as a prisoner of the state, not as a missionary on his way to Spain (cf. Ac. 28:16).

Did Paul ever reach Spain? By the 5th century, Christian tradition had it that Paul was released after his hearing before Nero and completed his mission to Spain.[191] A much earlier tradition asserts that Paul reached "the extreme limit of the west".[192] The Muratorian Fragment assumes Paul made it to Spain.[193] Still, the earliest tradition puts Paul's martyrdom under Nero after the great fire in AD 64, and if this is true, then a trip to Spain must be fitted into a relatively narrow time frame—not impossible, but less likely.[194] In the end, the modern reader will have to be satisfied with a certain amount of ambiguity about the closing years of Paul's life.

Paul's conclusion, before he adds greetings to individuals, sounds an ominous note. He solicits prayer from the Roman believers in his evangelistic struggle and his acute sense that he stood in personal danger from the Judean Jews who had rejected the messiahship of Jesus (15:30-31a). To go back to Jerusalem was to face the teeth of the opposition, and Paul knew it! His prayer request was for safety to complete his mission, so that his further plans might be accomplished (15:31b-32). This sixth sense of danger, as we know from Luke's record, became more explicit as Paul continued his trip eastward (cf. Ac. 20:22-24; 21:4, 10-14). The concluding "amen"

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[191] Eusebius' comment, however, is the rather leading "Report has it…", cf. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 444.

[192] 1 Clement 5.

[193] Bruce, *Paul*, p. 449.

[194] Bruce, *Paul*, p. 441.

finishes this portion of the letter before his final remarks.[195]

Personal Greetings (16:1-16)

Several remarkable features are evident in the various personal greetings Paul offers to individuals in the Roman church. First, he names far more persons than in any of his other letters, and inasmuch as he had never personally visited Rome, at first glance this might seem to be unusual. However, as others have pointed out, it can be even more difficult to name specific people in a site one has visited, because the risk of leaving out someone important is much greater. In a church such as Rome, where Paul had not visited, the number of people he might personally know would be proportionately smaller, and hence, easier to name.

How did Paul know these people in the first place? Again, one can only speculate. Certainly there was considerable freedom of movement in the Roman Empire. Those who might have been Jewish Paul could have met after the Jews had been expelled by Claudius, which apparently is how he first met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth (cf. Ac. 18:1-3). At least one person Paul knew as the first convert in Asia, possibly in Ephesus (16:5b). Others were relatives of Paul, and with two of them Paul once had been incarcerated (16:7, 11).[196] Of the rest, nothing is known.

Another feature of these greetings is that Paul names several "households", or in some cases, certain people and those who were "with them," presumably the leaders and meeting places of various house churches (16:5, 10b, 11b, 14, 15). Households were a fundamental institution in Greco-Roman culture, and a household was "a large inclusive and socially cohesive unit" composed of several families bound together under the principal family and including friends, clients and slaves whose association was valuable to the common enterprise of the household, such as, agriculture or mercantilism. The entire body of Christians in Rome probably did not meet together at one time except on rare occasions, but rather, they met in different settings. About a century after Paul wrote the Roman letter, Justin Martyr still refers to several house-based meetings in Rome. The hosts of the household churches naturally would become the leaders of the household church communities.[197]

Finally, Paul's greetings include a considerable number of feminine names, women who featured prominently in either the Roman church or some other aspect of Christian life and ministry. In Judaism, by contrast, the role of women was extremely

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[195] For the textual dislocations regarding this closing, see footnote #4.

[196] Luke's record in Acts may not record all of Paul's imprisonments. In another letter, Paul mentions "imprisonments" in the plural even before his arrest in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Co. 6:5; 11:23), and Clement cites some seven times Paul was incarcerated, cf. 1 Clement 5.

[197] D. Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament: A Sociological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), pp. 79-84.

limited. Men and women were segregated for worship, and the women even had to depart the synagogue before the teaching of the Torah commenced. In the Greco-Roman mystery religions, their participation, while not as restricted as in Judaism, still was considerable, and some cults, such as Mithraism, were male-exclusive. That Paul names so many women speaks of a decided shift in cultural mores among the Christians. That he could assume without hesitation that these women would be hearing the public reading of his letter means that the restrictions imposed under the typical synagogue order had been abandoned.

The same can be said of slaves, who now were privileged to participate in the church alongside their masters. While it is difficult to discern who among Paul's list might have been slaves, the name of Tertius (lit., "number three" in Latin), whom Paul used as a scribe, suggests a person who may have been a slave (16:22). Also, Quartus (lit., "number four" in Latin) may have been a slave (16:23b).

Among the names in the list, several have short but suggestive descriptions. Phoebe is the most prominent, since apparently Paul chose her to be the courier of the letter (16:1-2). Letters of recommendation were important inasmuch as there was no available general postal service in the Roman Empire, and the dispatch of private letters depended upon private couriers.[198] To a church like Corinth, which Paul knew well, such introductory letters were unnecessary (cf. 2 Co. 3:1-3). However, the Romans would not have known Phoebe of Cenchrea, and Paul's direct commendation would assure the recipients of the genuineness of his correspondence.[199] Further, couriers such as Phoebe not only were trusted with the physical letters, they also were trusted as representatives able to expand upon the letters in person (cf. Ep. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8). The courier would likely have been the person to first read the letter publicly, which in turn would have been the occasion for any explanations or expansions.[200] Phoebe is given no less than three impressive titles of distinction, ἀδελφή (= sister), διακονος τῆς ἐκκλησίας (= deacon, minister of the church) and προστάτις (= patron, leader). The first identifies her as a Christian, the second as a leader in the church,[201] and the third as a person of civic standing

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[198] E. Agosto, "Paul and Commendation," *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. P. Sampley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2003), pp. 101-110.

[199] Many hundreds of letters still exist from the ancient world, including even handbooks on style. Letters of introduction or commendation were common. Compare, for instance, early examples of other commendations that parallel the one for Phoebe: *XX, who is conveying this letter to you, is a man we have proven and whom we love because of his faithfulness. Please be hospitable to him both for my sake and his, and indeed for your own sake also.* Or, *This honorable and sought after man whom you receive should be treated hospitably, for I have been grateful to him on account of his distinguished dealing in my behalf.* Or, *Hermophilus the bearer of this letter is [the friend or relative] of –erius, and asked me to write to you*, cf. W. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), pp. 10-11.

[200] Doty, p. 46.

and/or a benefactor to the church.[202]

Prisca and Aquila (16:3-5a) were a couple whom readers meet several times in the New Testament. Originally forced to leave Rome due to Claudius' decree of expulsion, they now apparently had moved back, where they used their home for one of the house churches. The circumstances in which they risked their lives in Paul's behalf are unknown.

Epenetus of Asia was likely a Gentile, while Mary was likely a Jewess, at least if their names hold true to form (16:5b-6).

Andronicus and Junia, probably a married couple, were fellow-prisoners at some point with Paul (16:7). That they were Jewish seems evident in that they were Paul's kin. Modern attention has primarily focused upon Junia, since she is both an apostle and a woman.[203] Here, the term apostle functions more or less the same as our modern term missionary (cf. Ac. 14:4, 14; 2 Co. 8:23; Ga. 1:19; Phil. 2:25; 1 Th. 1:1; 2:7), and since Junia was an apostle, she becomes one more testimony among others to female roles of leadership in early Christianity.

The next several names are largely unknown (16:8-11). Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis are all women (16:12). Rufus and his mother (16:13) may be connected with Simon of Cyrene, the man compelled to carry Jesus' cross (cf. Mk. 15:21). Since Mark's Gospel is associated with the church in Rome, this identification is not unlikely. The next series contains both men and women (16:14-15), again largely unknown.

The early church greeting of a sacred kiss (16:16; cf. 1 Co. 16:20; 2 Co. 13:12; 1 Th. 5:26; 1 Pe. 5:14) carried on at least into the post-apostolic period, for it was mentioned by Justin Martyr as the appropriate gesture following baptisms and

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[201] Whether or not this was an established office is debated. This appearance of the word is the earliest formal mention of the term in Christian history. Translations vary in their treatment. English versions reluctant to give women any role of leadership tend to translate it as "servant" (NIV, KJV, NASB), but others give it a more substantial rendering, such as, "deaconness" or "deacon" (RSV, NRSV, NAB, JB), "office" (NEB), "key representative" (Peterson) or "leader" (CEV).

[202] As with the term deacon, translations vary in their treatment of προστασις. Those reluctant to give women a leadership role again tend to use words with a reduced nuance, such as, "succourer" or "helper" (KJV, RSV, NASB). Others give it a nuance more normative for the language of the period, such as, "benefactor" (NRSV) or "respected leader" (CEV). The term προστάτις, as Dunn has pointed out, would mark Phoebe as a figure of significance, a person probably of wealth and influence whose resources had been put at the disposal of the church, cf. Dunn, II.889.

[203] While some translations between the 1950s and the 1970s spell her name as Junias (a masculine form), this is almost certainly a mistake, cf. J. Thorley, "Junia a Woman Apostle," *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996), pp. 24-26 and R. Cervin, "A Note Regarding the Name 'Junia(s)' in Romans 16:7," *New Testament Studies* 40/3 (1994), pp. 464-70. Translations older than the 1950s and more recent than the 1970s use the feminine form of Junia (so KJV, ASV, TEV, NKJV, NRSV, NLT, revised NAB). N. T. Wright categorizes the arguments for a masculine rendering as "desperate attempts", *NIB* (2002) 762. For more details regarding this name, see L. Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 55-56.

preceding communion.[204]

Final Words (16:17-27)

Paul's closing words include a strong admonition against divisions within the Christian fellowship (16:17). In view of everything else he has said about the tension between Jews and Gentiles, this is Paul's last word urging Christian unity. Those who contend for their points of view to the dividing of Christians against each other are not serving Christ Jesus but themselves 16:18). They are charlatans! Still, Paul is confident about the faithfulness of his Roman audience, and his advice about wisdom echoes the teaching of Jesus (16:19; cf. Mt. 10:16). They can be assured that God's promise at the very beginning of human history (Ge. 3:15) would soon be fulfilled (16:20)!

Next, Paul sends greetings from those who were with him in Corinth. Timothy is well-known as his protégé, and others are Paul's kin, some of whom may be the same as persons mentioned in Luke's account of Paul's travels (16:21; cf. Ac. 17:5-9; 20:4). Tertius served as Paul's amanuensis (16:22). Gaius may be the same as the one mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14. Erastus was immortalized by an inscription that survived into modern times, excavated in Corinth and reading: *Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense*.[205] Quartus is unknown.

Paul's concluding doxology about God's mystery, long hidden but now revealed, echoes the description of the Servant in Isaiah as a "polished arrow…concealed in God's quiver" (cf. Is. 49:2). What once had been in the background of the long history of Israel had now come to the forefront so that all people in all nations might come to faith and obedience (16:25-26). Once again, as in 1:5, there is no tension between faith and obedience. All has been done and all is being done to God's glory through Jesus Christ (16:27)!

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[204] *First Apology*, 1:65.

[205] V. Furnish, "Corinth in Paul's Time—What Can Archaeology Tell Us?" *BAR* (May/June 1988), p. 20.