

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

The Book of Romans was written by **Paul,¹ a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle** (Romans 1:1).² His amanuensis was Tertius, who in closing gives personal greetings (Romans 16:22). We do not know with certainty the exact date of its writing, but most scholars estimate it to be early *AD* 55, during Paul's three month stay in Corinth that was part of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3; Romans 16:23). The letter may have been delivered to Rome by **Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae** (Romans 16:1).

The letter was written **to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be His holy people** (Romans 1:7), a congregation which Paul had not founded but was preparing to visit for the first time while en route to Spain (Romans 15:22-33).³

We do not know exactly what occasioned its writing. Scholars summarize no less than twelve possible reasons,⁴ but we cannot know with certainty. Though Paul addresses some specific difficulties in Rome (see Romans 14:1-15:13), there is no indication he wrote in response to situations in the Church such as occasioned 1 Corinthians. Kruse believes "Paul's *primary* purpose in writing Romans was to minister to the believers in Rome...ensur[ing] that their understanding of the gospel was such that they would

¹ Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (modern day Turkey) in the early years of the Christian era. He was of the Jewish tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5) and his Hebrew name was Saul. (Paul was his Roman name.) His parents were committed Yahwists (Philippians 3:5) who were Roman citizens, so Paul possessed Roman citizenship from birth (Acts 22:28). He was well educated in Gentile culture, although the thrust of his education was Jewish, having been educated in Jerusalem by Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was at least tri-lingual (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek). He was highly zealous for the Mosaic Law and for Jewish Tradition (Galatians 1:14) and his first appearance in Scripture is as an advocate of these perspectives (Acts 9:1-2). His initial encounter with Jesus is a supernatural one while on the road to Damascus, when Christ intercepted him in the midst of his Pharisaical fanaticism and zeal to destroy His Church (Acts 9:3-9).

² All scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the TNIV.

³ We do not know how, when or by whom the Church in Rome (a largely Gentile Church but with Jewish believers too) was founded. Acts 2:10 states that **visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism)** were in the listening audience on the Day of Pentecost, some of whom may have responded to Peter's message and carried the gospel back. "The (best) probability is that traders and other travelers first brought Christianity to Rome" (Leon Morris, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary—The Epistle To The Romans*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988).

⁴ See Morris, *loc. cit.*, pp. 7-17.

constitute an acceptable sacrifice to God, consecrated by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 1:16-15:13) with a *secondary* purpose of “preparing the way for his visit to Rome and subsequent mission in Spain” while soliciting prayer for his “collection visit” to Jerusalem (Romans 1:1-15; 15:14-16:27).⁵ “The main body of Romans is what we may call a ‘treatise,’ or ‘tractate.’ It addresses key theological issues against the backdrop of middle first-century Christianity rather than within the context of specific local problems.”⁶

Its major theme is the gospel and its meaning.⁷ “Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”⁸

ROMANS 1:1-7—

Following common first-century epistolary style, Paul begins by identifying himself as the letter’s author. His self-designation as **a servant of Christ Jesus** (vs. 1) reflects off the LXX’s use of **servant** (Greek, *doulos* [*cf. bond-servant* {NAS} or *slave* {NRSV footnote}]) and ties his former allegiance to Yahweh as a Pharisee to His current allegiance as an apostle to the crucified Jewish Messiah, **Christ Jesus**. This self-designation and the accompanying **called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God** (vs. 1) hearkens back to Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19); it sets him in the tradition of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5) and “tells us what he regarded as most important about himself, or at least as most relevant to his readers.”⁹

Departing from conventional epistolary format, Paul parenthetically shows the gospel’s promise in the Old Testament by noting it is **the gospel He promised beforehand**

⁵ Kruse, Colin, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary—Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2012, pg. 11.

⁶ Moo, Douglas, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament—The Epistle To The Romans*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, pg. 14.

⁷ Throughout Church history, Romans has been a catalyst for reform and transformation. It was while reading Romans 13:13-14 in the fourth century that Saint Augustine came to know Christ; in the sixteenth century, the young German monk, Martin Luther, discovered the truth of salvation by grace through faith while reading Romans and his personal transformation led to the launch of the Protestant Reformation.

⁸ Martin Luther quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 22.

⁹ Dunn, James D.G., *Word Biblical Commentary—Romans*, Word Books, Publisher, Dallas, TX, 1988, pg. 21.

through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures (vs. 2). The core message of the epistle (**the gospel**), therefore, is not Paul's own invention; it has continuity with Israel's longstanding historic faith, despite the fact that **not all the Israelites accepted the good news** (Romans 10:16). Continuing with his parenthesis, we are informed next that the gospel **regard[s] His Son, who as to His earthly life was a descendant of David** (vs. 3),¹⁰ which emphasizes that the gospel is a Person in unique relationship to Israel's Yahweh...a Person who incidentally is Jewish by nationality (again emphasizing continuity with the Old Testament). Lastly with reference to his parenthesis, Paul notes that Jesus did not become God's Son through resurrection (He was obviously that already), but His resurrection did enlarge the scope of His Sonship (i.e., declared Him Lord globally and inaugurated a new age—**who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power**¹¹ **by His resurrection from the dead** [vs. 4]).

Returning now to his main introductory thought, **we**¹² **received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to faith and obedience** (vs. 5).¹³ Here Paul notes his first of many insights into grace in Romans...namely, grace is given not just to benefit the recipient but to enable the recipient to further God's will. We also see one intended response to **faith** (the gospel)...that its adherents obey Christ.

- *Obedience follows from the truth Paul expressed in his opening line when he described himself as a “slave” of Christ. Believers belong to Christ without reserve. Therefore they owe him the most complete obedience. It is not without interest that this epistle, which puts such stress on the free salvation won for us by Christ's atoning act, should also stress the importance of obedient response.*¹⁴

Having noted that the Roman Church was both predominately Gentile in constituency and that it sat in the center of the known Gentile world (vs. 6), Paul closes his salutation

¹⁰ “This clause assumes the preexistence of the Son...and (is) a clear allusion to the messianic stature of the Son” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 46).

¹¹ The idea here is that as the Son of God Jesus is powerful. “The gospel does not simply offer people some bright ideas and then leave them to put them into practice as best they can. Christians live out their faith in a strength not their own, the power of God's Holy Spirit” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 46).

¹² This is best interpreted rhetorically, that is as an equivalent to “I.”

¹³ **To call...to faith and obedience** has the idea of **to call to obedience which faith demands**.

¹⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 49.

by reminding the Church that they **are loved by God and called to be His holy people** (vs. 7) and gives both a Greek (**grace**) and Jewish (**peace**)¹⁵ blessing (vs. 7).

ROMANS 1:8-15—

As is often his custom, Paul follows his salutation with a thanksgiving statement—**I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith¹⁶ is being reported all over the world** (vs. 8). Rome was a strategic city in the ancient world and a place where one would most certainly have wanted a vibrant Church; the fact that there was such a Church in Rome was therefore cause for celebration **all over the world¹⁷** (facilitated no doubt by the amount of movement to and from Rome).

Moving to assure the Romans of his commitment to them and his integrity in desiring to see them, Paul states two matters of constant¹⁸ prayer—**I remember you in my prayers...and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you** (vv. 9-10)—confirming such by way of a solemn oath—**God...is my witness** (vs. 9).¹⁹ He also restates his life calling—**I serve...in preaching the gospel of His Son** (vs. 9; cf. Romans 1:1) and notes that he is sincerely involved in this life calling down to the very core of his being—**I serve in my spirit** (vs. 9; cf. **I serve with my whole heart** [NIV]); this is something they would not be able to see but in Paul’s perspective they needed to know.

Although we are not sure why, Paul next further reiterates his sincerity in wanting to see them despite the fact it has not worked out to date (vv. 11-13). Perhaps his sincerity to visit or the integrity of his word was being questioned. His longing²⁰ to see them is **so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong** (vs. 11). His reference is general and generic...tantamount to saying he is confident God will somehow use him as a fellow believer during his visit to influence and benefit

¹⁵ **Peace** (Greek, *eirene*) here is equivalent to the Hebrew *shalom*, “...not so much the absence of war or strife as the presence of positive blessing” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 54).

¹⁶ This is not saying that their **faith** is special or unique, but rather is equivalent to saying, “The fact that there are Christians in Rome is being reported all over the world.”

¹⁷ Most scholars see this statement as a hyperbolic way of saying, “Very widespread.”

¹⁸ This does not refer to “unceasing petition, or the like, but to prayer offered at frequent and regular intervals” (Peter T. O’Brien quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 59). See also **at all times** (Romans 1:10).

¹⁹ We see here the importance of those involved in preaching the gospel also praying for God’s people.

²⁰ Note Paul’s use of emotive language.

them²¹...an influence and benefit which he then humbly notes will be mutual and reciprocal—**that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith** (vs. 12). “He hopes to receive help as well as to give it during his purposed visit to Rome.”²² Before Paul concludes the paragraph by reiterating his truest passion—**that I might have a harvest²³ among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles** (vs. 13)—he again mentions his delay in coming by way of stating important information not necessarily known to the Romans—**I do not want you to be unaware...that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)** (vs. 13). We do not know what prevented Paul, but the wording intimates circumstances beyond his control. Moo believes it was “probably the demands on Paul of his ministry in the eastern Mediterranean (see Romans 15:19),”²⁴ a perspective shared by Calvin, “We may take this to mean that the Lord employed him in more urgent business, which he could not have neglected without damage to the Church.”²⁵ It is likely not a reference to satanic prevention as at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Next, Paul states clearly that his apostolic calling **to preach the gospel** (vs. 15) has placed him under obligation (howbeit one which he eagerly embraces)—**I am obligated...[and] eager to preach the gospel** (vv. 14-15). “Paul’s plan to have a harvest among the Roman Christians has its source not in a desire for personal aggrandizement but in his sense of missionary ‘obligation’.”²⁶ This obligation to preach is primarily to Gentiles, but also extends to all nationalities and certainly to all classes of people, which Paul defines using customary social designations from sophisticated Greek culture—**I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish** (vs. 14). “Paul, in elaborating his sense of call to evangelize (primarily) the

²¹ Scholars see several other exegetical possibilities as to Paul’s meaning of **some spiritual gift** including (among others) the impartation of one of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. See Longenecker, Richard, *The Epistle to the Romans—The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2016, pp. 113-118 for a detailed analysis.

²² Bruce, F.F., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries—Romans*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990 reprint, pg. 72.

²³ **Harvest** likely emphasizes the beneficial outcome of converts, but may also reference “strengthening of the faith and obedience of those already believing” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary—Romans*, T & T Clark Limited, Edinburg, Scotland, 1975, pg. 82).

²⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 61.

²⁵ John Calvin quoted in Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 82.

²⁶ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 61.

Gentiles deliberately looks at the world through the eyes of a Gentile, from the perspective of sophisticated Hellenism.”²⁷

ROMANS 1:16-17—

“Most commentators recognize in [these verses] the ‘text’ of the epistle; it is not wrong to see in them a summary of Paul’s theology as a whole.”²⁸ That text? **The gospel**. Why Paul felt a need to state that he was **not ashamed of the gospel** (vs. 16) eludes us,²⁹ but his basis for emphatically standing by it and living to proclaim it is clear—**it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes** (vs. 16). The **salvation** (Greek, *soteria*) that the gospel brings is used generically here to include “justification, redemption, and the like [as] particular aspects,”³⁰ including deliverance from God’s wrath in the final judgment. And what enables the gospel to bring such salvation? Its **power**. “Paul knows that this apparently weak and foolish message is really, in spite of all appearances, power, and not just one power over against others, but the supreme power, the almighty power of God Himself directed toward the salvation of men, God’s almighty saving...His effective power.”³¹

But there is a caveat—the gospel’s power is only beneficial **to everyone who believes** (vs. 16), that is to those who give a “response of surrender to the judgment and unmerited mercy of God which God Himself brings about [in the gospel]—knowing God not only directs the message to the hearer but also Himself lays open the hearer’s heart to the message.”³²

Paul next states why the gospel is **the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes** (vs. 16): **for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed** (vs. 17). By this Paul means that **in the gospel** “the act by which God brings people into right relationship with Himself”³³ **is revealed**; His righteousness is His declaring one

²⁷ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 36.

²⁸ C.K. Barrett quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 66.

²⁹ Longenecker feels the best explanation lies in viewing it “primarily as highly apologetic or polemical in nature and as responding to certain criticisms of his person, mission, and/or message being voiced by at least some of the Christians at Rome” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 161).

³⁰ Morris, *loc. cit.*, pg. 67.

³¹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 87.

³² *Ibid.*, pg. 90.

³³ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 74.

innocent in Christ, an innocence that prevents one from experiencing His wrath (see Romans 1:18-32). And how does one appropriate this declaration? The same way one experiences the power of God in salvation...**by faith** (vs. 17). This **by faith** response, Paul then notes, has always been and will always be God's only means of experiencing His kingdom life—**[it is] by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith"** (vs. 17).³⁴

ROMANS 1:18-32—

Paul begins here a section that continues through Romans 4:25 in which he discusses various aspects of God acting to bring people into right relationship with Himself. His first concern in understanding and appreciating this gracious act of God is that we understand why it is necessary, namely, the universal reign of sin that leads to God's judicious response—**the wrath of God is being revealed** (Romans 1:18). "As long as God is God, He cannot behold with indifference that His creation is destroyed and His holy will trodden underfoot. Therefore, He meets sin with His mighty and annihilating reaction."³⁵

The wrath of God [that] is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings (Romans 1:18)³⁶ is in the form of both a present reality—**God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts...to shameful lusts...[and] to a depraved mind**³⁷ (Romans 1:24, 26 and 28)—and a future reality—**you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed** (Romans 2:5).³⁸ **Gave them over** is built on the imagery of a judge handing over a prisoner to his just punishment, in this case, the punishment of "the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin."³⁹ Such punishment may be

³⁴ Paul's quote of Habakkuk 2:4 is an example of **the gospel...[being] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures** (Romans 1:2).

³⁵ Anders Nygren quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 100.

³⁶ **Human beings** here references all humanity, though Paul seems to be emphasizing the Gentiles' sinfulness as he will later talk more specifically about the Jews'.

³⁷ A person with a **depraved mind** is one who is "quite unable to make trustworthy moral judgments" because of having chosen to cut themselves off from a knowledge of God (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 94).

³⁸ This references eternal banishment to hell at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

³⁹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 111. **Men...received in themselves the due penalty for their error** (Romans 1:27) is "probably [a reference] to their sexual perversion itself as the punishment for their abandonment of the true

reformatory for some, but history proves it is unfortunately not for most. “Paul would see the act of handing over as punitive, but not as spiteful or vengeful. For him it is simply the case that man apart from God regresses to a lower level of animality.”⁴⁰

God’s response of wrath is painted against the backdrop of the willful intentionality with which humankind gives itself to sinfulness despite knowing enough to know that God has a moral code to be followed—**[they] suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them...[and] although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened** (Romans 1:19, 21). “This failure to give God his due and to receive life as God’s gift is Paul’s way of expressing the primal sin of humankind.”⁴¹ They are, therefore, **without excuse** (Romans 1:20) and His wrath justified.

The specific manifestations that Paul notes regarding this general sinfulness are—

- Idolatry (Romans 1:23, 25; cf. Psalm 106:20).
- **Sexual impurity** (Romans 1:24).
- Homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27).⁴²
- Twenty-one sociological ills such as **greed, envy, murder, strife**, gossip, arrogance, etc. (Romans 1:28-31), most of which reflect people harming people.

The depth to which their **depraved mind** has plunged is reiterated in Paul’s concluding statement—**they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them** (Romans 1:32). “We are not only bent on damning ourselves but we congratulate others in the doing of those things that we know have their issue in damnation.”⁴³ This also serves to show that Paul believes that generally speaking people are very aware of what they are doing and of the consequences, yet do it anyway.

God than to a necessary or appropriate but unspecified punishment for their sexual perversion” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127).

⁴⁰ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 62.

⁴¹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 59.

⁴² “The expression ‘in the same way’ (vs. 27) indicates that male homosexual practice is intended here just as female homosexual practice was intended in 1:26” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 103). This represents what is known as the “traditionalist’s” understanding of homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27. For the alternate “revisionist’s” understanding, see, Brownson, James, *Bible Gender Sexuality*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2013.

⁴³ John Murray quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 122.

BRIEF EXCURSUS ON ROMANS 1:19-20

What exactly does Paul mean in writing **what may be known about God is plain to [people]...God's invisible qualities...have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made?** Theologians refer to this as “The Doctrine of Natural Revelation” and Paul postulates it as the basis of **people [being] without excuse** in rejecting God and His moral code.⁴⁴ Roman Catholic scholars have generally been open to the possibility of people finding salvation through the witness of nature and one's conscience; Protestant theologians generally disagree, often vehemently, insisting that a saving knowledge of God comes exclusively through knowledge of Christ. Perhaps Moo summarizes Paul's intentionality best—

- *The text teaches that all people have, by reason of God's revelation in creation, access to some degree of knowledge about God (v. 19) and that, to however limited an extent, they subjectively perceive this knowledge (v. 20)...but this knowledge is both limited and impure; it is confined to those basic attributes of God that may be discerned in nature (v. 20) and is so mixed with false perceptions that it is almost immediately perverted...the knowledge of God that people possess outside special revelation is woefully inadequate, of itself, to save...the evidence of nature and conscience serves only to render them “without excuse” before the wrathful God.*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ “They (Gentiles) did not have the law of Moses, as the Jews had, but they had the law of conscience, the distinction between right and wrong, engraved on their hearts” (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 84).

⁴⁵ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 123. Longenecker, citing the personal experience of the Edinburgh theologian John Baillie and his life-long awareness of “the divine as a factor in my environment,” states, “God's revelation of himself is...present throughout the whole world and...he has prepared all people through his ‘general revelation’ in creation for the reception of his ‘special revelation’ in the proclamation of the gospel” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 228).

ROMANS 2:1-11—

Continuing with the matter of the sinfulness of all people...a sinfulness that brings about the experiencing of God's wrath unless one is made righteous by faith in the power of the gospel...Paul now turns to those who sit in moral judgment of the people described in Romans 1:18-32. "Paul now moves on to show that those who sit in judgment on their fellows are as guilty as those they judge. There is a natural tendency to justify ourselves for the wrong we do by condemning people who do other evils that we think are worse. 'The Pharisee is always present in each one of us' (Leenhardt)."⁴⁶

Paul makes his point using the ancient argument style known as diatribe, an imaginary dialogue with either one's student or opponent so as to prove a point. **You**, therefore, is not the Roman church, but moralists who fancy themselves exempt from God's judgment, particularly religious Jews (Romans 2:4, 17). "Just as people in general have turned away from the revelation that God has given in nature (1:20-32), so the Jews have turned away, through their disobedience, from the revelation that God has given them specially (2:17-24)...[and] stand on the same basic ground as Gentiles when it comes to God's judgment."⁴⁷ **So when you, a mere human, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? (vs. 3). Do the same things** likely refers most specifically to the sociological ills in Romans 1:29-31, as idolatry and homosexuality were probably not part of the religious Jews' practices (though they certainly could be). **We know⁴⁸ that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth** (vs. 2) indicates that God has factual proof these moralists are engaging in such practices and hence **condemning [themselves]** (vs. 1), even if they are in personal denial of such. What makes this as it were "doubly horrific" is that as God's covenant people the Jews were recipients of **the riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience**, which were not to be taken advantage of (i.e., "We are

⁴⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 107.

⁴⁷ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 126-127.

⁴⁸ **We know** translates a Greek word (*oidamen*) that indicates something accepted as irrefutable fact.

covenant people, so we are forgiven despite conduct”), but were rather **intended to lead [them] to repentance** (vs. 4). “In all this it is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that Paul’s aim is directed at what he sees to be the overconfidence in their election on the part of many of his fellow Jews.”⁴⁹

Paul’s next paragraph (vv. 5-11) moves to the general principle involved in the diatribe—God “**will repay everyone according to what they have done**” (vs. 6, quoting Psalm 62:12)...**there will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism** (vv. 9-11). “Judgment means that those who have acted in accordance with God’s will will be rewarded, whereas those who have opposed God will be punished.”⁵⁰

Anyone familiar with biblical theology, especially Paul’s, knows that these verses create a theological conundrum. Cranfield notes that there are no less than ten theological explanations as to Paul’s intent, ranging from Paul is inconsistent with reference to the fact that no one is justified by works of the law to he is speaking hypothetically, “leaving the gospel out of account and arguing from the presuppositions of the Jew.”⁵¹ In formulating his personal perspective, he notes—

- *It is absolutely vital to the true understanding of these verses to recognize that the statement of vs. 6 is not made in a legalistic sense—it is not an assertion of requital according to desserts—and that it is not implied in vv. 7 and 10 that the people referred to earn eternal life. The good work is not regarded as constituting a claim upon God, but as the expression of faith and repentance. The good work no more earns salvation than does the evil work. The difference between them is the difference between evidence of openness to God’s judgment and mercy and evidence of the persistence of a proud and stubborn self-righteousness.*⁵²

⁴⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 91.

⁵⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 114. Note Kruse on vs. 7. “[To those] doing good...He will give eternal life relates to the behavior expected of followers of Christ, those who are already saved...although the obedience in question entails specific and concrete acts of lifestyle pleasing to God, it must be remembered that ‘the future justification of God’s people is not made to hinge on, say, 51% (or more!) of law-keeping, because obedience itself is the produce of faith; and where true faith and love exist, there must be ultimate justification’” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125).

⁵¹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-153.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pg. 153. Revelation 20:12 notes this same principle—the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

ROMANS 2:12-16—

Continuing his basic premise of Romans 2:1-11,⁵³ Paul's main point here is to show that God's "level playing field of judgment" does not give the Jews a decisive edge at the eschatological judgment seat merely because they possess the law;⁵⁴ sinfulness requiring condemnation if one is not justified by faith in the gospel is universal and judgment is meted out according to response to the light one has—**all who sin apart from the law⁵⁵ will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged⁵⁶ by the law...on the day when God judges everyone's secrets through Jesus Christ** (vv. 12, 16). There are two bases for Paul's premise. 1) It is doing the law, not merely possessing it as God's covenant people, that matters (vs. 13) and 2) even Gentiles **who do not have the law do by nature things required by the law...[showing] that the requirements of the law⁵⁷ are written on their hearts** (vv. 14-15). Despite the dark picture of Romans 1:18-32, the image of God in which human beings are created has left within them residue of an ability to know, discern and lead somewhat upright lives (despite the Fall)...“although this was not their ground of justification before God.”⁵⁸

Dunn has an interesting remark on Paul's argument here with reference to those who never hear the gospel—

- *He does not actually say that this “work of the law” will guarantee their acquittal on the day of judgment; if anything his language is designed rather to explain how it is that Gentiles who sin without the law can yet be held responsible (vv 12, 15bc)...but neither does he deny the possibility that there are among the unevangelized Gentiles “doers of the law” who shall be acquitted (v 13); he does not ask the question and his treatment leaves the answer open.⁵⁹*

⁵³ Romans 2:12 begins in Greek with *gar* (**for**), left un-translated in the TNIV and NRSV but rightly included in the NASV and ESV.

⁵⁴ “Even the law does not mark a clear distinction between Jew and Gentile, that Jew is not better than Gentile for having the law, that so far as the real business of the law is concerned there are Gentiles who stand a better chance of acquittal at the final judgment than many Jews” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 104).

⁵⁵ **The law** here references the law of Moses and those sinning apart from it are Gentiles—**foreigners to the covenants of the promise** (Ephesians 2:12).

⁵⁶ The intimation here is that those **judged by the law** will be found condemned.

⁵⁷ This references the law's intentionality, namely, that people conduct themselves according to God's moral precepts.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 86. See also note #49 above.

⁵⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 107.

ROMANS 2:17-24—

Resuming his diatribe that was interrupted beginning with vs. 6, the “you” becomes crystal clear—**now you, if⁶⁰ you call yourself a Jew** (vs. 17). His intent in these paragraphs is not immediately obvious, but seems to be a challenge once again to the Jews’ sense of superiority over the Gentiles and their sense of privilege with reference to God’s judgment because of heritage Yahweh had granted them (vv. 17-24) and because of physical circumcision (vv. 25-29).

Jew, which had come to replace “Israelite” or “Hebrew” following the Exile, was the common designation in Paul’s day for anyone who belonged to the people group of Israel, the people of the covenant. By way of six commonly held beliefs among Jews as a whole at the time—**rely[ing] on the law...boast[ing] in God⁶¹...know[ing] His will... approv[ing] of what is superior...[being] instructed in the law...[and being] convinced that you are a guide for the blind** (vv. 17-20)—Paul’s apodosis is another indictment against their failure to “practice what they preach”—**you preach against stealing...[but] steal...say that people should not commit adultery...[but] commit adultery...abhor idols...[but] rob temples⁶²** (vv. 21-24). The collective failure is so significant that they not only **dishonor God by breaking the law** (vs. 23), but **“God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you”** (vs. 24, quoting Isaiah 52:5 and likely alluding to Ezekiel 36:20-23).⁶³ As Dunn notes, “Once the typical Jew’s *a priori* status as Jew before God by virtue of his people’s election is seen to be called in question, then the broader indictment of man in general (1:18-32) can be seen to apply more clearly to Jew as well as Gentile (2:9-11).”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ The Greek construction (*ei*) has the sense of “because.”

⁶¹ Paul may be using this claim with overtones of “self-glorifying in God.”

⁶² The precise meaning of **rob temples** is difficult to ascertain but apparently references “mak[ing] profits from dishonest practices connected with idolatry” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 137).

⁶³ “In Isaiah, the blaspheming of God’s name occurs through the oppression of Israel, God’s chosen people, by foreign powers. Paul ascribes the cause of the blasphemy to the disobedient lives of his people. Perhaps Paul intends the reader to see the irony in having responsibility for dishonoring God’s name transferred from the Gentiles to the people of Israel” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 166).

⁶⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 116.

ROMANS 2:25-29—

Paul closes the chapter by discussing the fact that physical circumcision (the sign of admission to God’s covenant with Israel [Genesis 17:9-14]) does not in and of itself shield one (just like possessing the law [vv. 17-24]) from God’s judgment.⁶⁵ There must be an accompanied life-style—**circumcision has value if you observe the law** (vs. 25). “Circumcision admitted to membership of the covenant people, but this is of no avail unless one lives as a member of that covenant people.”⁶⁶ It was important that Paul include this understanding in his argument because physical circumcision was a chief grounds of Jewish confidence. “Later Judaism claimed that ‘no person who is circumcised will go down to Gehenna’,”⁶⁷ a perspective Paul bluntly disqualifies—**if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised** (vs. 25).⁶⁸

In the same vein as vv. 12-15, Paul then goes from specific to general noting—**the one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law⁶⁹ will condemn you⁷⁰ who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker** (vs. 27). It is the inward that cannot be seen, the endeavor to seek after God by faith and live in accordance with the spirit of His precepts, that wins His acceptance, regardless of nationality or spiritual heritage—**a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart,⁷¹ by the Spirit,⁷² not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is...from God** (vs. 29).

⁶⁵ Romans 2:25 also begins in Greek with *gar* (**for**), again left un-translated in the TNIV and NRSV but rightly included in the NASV and ESV.

⁶⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 139.

⁶⁷ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 167.

⁶⁸ This does not mean “that the Jew’s circumcision has been annulled in God’s sight, but that he has become uncircumcised in heart...and now, though still a member of God’s special people to whom God is still faithful, stands in his human existence in a negative, and no longer in a positive, relation to God’s purpose in history, and is outside that Israel remnant within Israel” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 172).

⁶⁹ **Obeys the law** is not to be taken as Paul teaching obedience to the law is salvific. Rather, it references one’s endeavor to live so as to please God (*cf.* Romans 2:14).

⁷⁰ “It will not be a case of the faithful Jew passing judgment on the lawless Gentile, as the interlocutor began by thinking (2:1-3), but rather a case of the law-fulfilling Gentile (by his faith and life) passing judgment on the law-transgressing Jew...in a fitting climax to the argument the tables are nearly turned on the interlocutor, and the counsel for the prosecution (2:1-3) finds himself in the dock!” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 127).

⁷¹ The matter of **circumcision of the heart** goes back to Moses (see Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6).

⁷² Or **circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal** (NRSV). “Paul teaches us, by analogy, that as those who are committed to ‘God in Christ’ we need constantly to be aware of the disparities of our lives between profession and practice, and to bring these matters before God in repentance and confession” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 324).

ROMANS 3:1-8—

Paul’s diatribe that there is a “level playing field” with reference to judgment for both Jew and Gentile, and that spiritual heritage and circumcision in and of themselves without accompanying life-style of commitment to Yahweh are not “get out of hell free” cards for Jews (Romans 2:17-29), anticipates a natural question from the Jews—**what advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?** (vs. 1). Paul will take this up in great detail in Romans 9-11 for he knows that his argument in Romans 2 does not nullify Israel’s unique place in salvation history; but for now, his response is quite simple and direct—**much in every way!** (vs. 2).⁷³ For example—**the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God** (vs. 2).⁷⁴ **The very words of God** likely references the Old Testament as a whole, perhaps with an emphasis on the gospel promises contained therein as referenced in Romans 1:2. “For Paul, pre-eminent among the ‘word of God’ entrusted to the Jewish people would have been the preaching of the gospel by Jesus Christ himself and continued by Paul and the other apostles.”⁷⁵

Having stated his example, Paul diverts to a more important matter for the moment—**what if some [Jews] were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness?** (vs. 3). In other words, is there any culpability with God for Israel’s overall lack of response (unfaithfulness) to the gospel as promised in **the very words of God?**

- *The faithfulness of God is basic. Without that nothing makes sense. We must, of course, bear in mind that “faithfulness” means faithfulness in keeping his promises to judge the wicked, as well as those to bless those who love him. We should also remember that God in his faithfulness can use Israel’s unbelief to promote his purposes (cf. 11:11, 15).*⁷⁶

⁷³ Jesus Himself noted, “**Salvation is from the Jews**” (John 4:22).

⁷⁴ **First of all** (Romans 3:2) may indicate that Paul initially had additional specifics in mind but diverts to another core issue at stake or it may have the idea of **chiefly**, Paul picking this particular example because of “the continuity between the revelation given to Israel and the gospel of God’s Son” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 138).

⁷⁵ Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 160.

⁷⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 155.

Paul is quick to strongly deny such an implication—**not at all!** (vs. 4).⁷⁷ Not only is God faithful when Israel was unfaithful, but in the bigger picture “he remains true *even if* every person should prove unreliable”⁷⁸—**let God be true, and every human being a liar** (vs. 4, quoting Psalm 116:11). Paul then backs up his premise with a LXX quote from David in Psalm 51:4, whereby David acknowledged Yahweh was just (trustworthy) in dealing with him as He did following his sin with Bathsheba—“**so that You may be proved right when You speak and prevail when You judge**” (vs. 4).

Paul now moves to another anticipated rejoinder (vv. 5-8). It is similar in nature to the antinomian concern he will address in Romans 6:1, a concern stemming from his teaching that **where sin increased, grace increased all the more** (Romans 5:20), namely—**if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing His wrath on us?** (vs. 5; see also vv. 7-8). “If the main result of sin is to advance God’s purpose in some way, then it would seem that *God is unjust* when he punishes it.”⁷⁹ Again, this is unthinkable—**certainly not!** (vs. 6)—not only because it falsely impugns God’s character, but because it makes a mockery of a very well-known and attested truth among Jews and Christians that God judges all and sends some (both Jew and Gentile) to eternity in hell—**if that were so, how could God judge the world?** (vs. 6).

Before leaving this section, note Moo’s devotional application—

- *The problem Paul attacks in these verses is not confined to the people of God of his day. All too often we Christians have presumed that God’s grace to us exempts us from any concern about our sin. Particularly is this a danger among Christians who share with me the belief that God sovereignly maintains the regenerate in their salvation till the end. Too easily do we forget that God’s ultimate concern is for his own glory and not for our blessing; that his righteousness is beautifully displayed when he judges as well as when he saves.*⁸⁰

⁷⁷ **God forbid** (KJV); **Certainly not!** (NKJV); **May it never be!** (NASV); **By no means!** (ESV).

⁷⁸ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 186.

⁷⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 158. Morris goes not to note relative to Paul’s parenthesis (**I am using a human argument** [Romans 3:5]) that “God’s justice is so important for Paul that even to raise the hypothetical possibility of divine injustice requires an explanatory apology” (*op. cit.*, pg. 159).

⁸⁰ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-197.

ROMANS 3:9-20—

Returning to the main point that he began in Romans 1:18 that “unless there is something to be saved from, there is no point in preaching salvation (or in embracing it),”⁸¹ Paul again states—**we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin** (vs. 9). As already noted, there is indeed advantage to the Jews as God’s elect nation (Romans 3:1-2), but that advantage is not in terms of standing before God in judgment—**do we⁸² have any advantage? Not at all! We have already made the charge...** (vs. 9). “Privileges or no privileges, Jews and Gentiles stand equally in need of his grace...[and] ‘What do we hold before us as a defense?’ (answer: ‘Nothing; we are all alike held fast by sin’).”⁸³ Paul’s use of **sin** (vs. 9) clearly presents it as a “power which can and does dominate all humankind, giving rise (so it is implied) to the unrighteousness, all the pride, selfish ambition and disregard for the truth documented in chaps. 1 and 2.”⁸⁴ Paul documents this general truth by quoting several psalms and a passage from Isaiah 59 (vv. 10-18), and again addresses a possible objection from the Jews that such verses apply only to Gentiles—**now we know that whatever the law⁸⁵ says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God** (vs. 19).

He then concludes the section by stating—**therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin** (vs. 20). This is a core Pauline truth that will be developed later in the epistle, namely, that there is no hope to the human predicament outside the gospel and that one must never lean on the law beyond its intent (**through the law we become conscious of our sin**). “This last proposition—that no flesh shall be justified in this way—is virtually an axiom with the Apostle: it is a first principle in all his spiritual

⁸¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 163.

⁸² Commentators debate who Paul references with **we**; the statement likely means, “Does any human being (Jew or Gentile) have a particular advantage?”

⁸³ Bruce, F.F., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries—Romans—Revised Edition*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990 reprint, pg. 93.

⁸⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 156.

⁸⁵ **The law** here references the entire Old Testament, as exemplified in the previously quoted texts from Psalms and Isaiah.

thinking, and hence everything must be true which can be deduced from it, and everything must take place which is required to support it.”⁸⁶

ROMANS 3:21-26—

In this section, Paul changes topics (**but now** [vs. 21]). Having elaborated the plight of humankind (Romans 1:18-3:20), a plight that necessitates **the wrath of God...being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings** (Romans 1:18), Paul begins to elaborate with regard to his previously noted sole solution that reverses this depressing plight—**the gospel...[which is] the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...[wherein] the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last** (Romans 1:16-17). Martin Luther called this section of Romans “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.”⁸⁷ “After a section in which the need for [God’s] righteousness has been demonstrated in detail (1:18-3:20), Paul is now prepared to explain how the righteousness of God—his eschatological justifying activity—empowers the gospel to mediate salvation to sinful human beings.”⁸⁸

Paul begins by again reiterating that the answer to attaining right standing before God (the gospel) is part of God’s longstanding redemptive plan—**the righteousness of God has been made known,⁸⁹ to which the Law and the Prophets testify** (vs. 21; *cf.* Romans 1:2). He has made it known **apart from the law** (vs. 21), that is, “God’s saving outreach is not determined by an individual’s being a Jew; it is not dependent upon his being within the religious space bounded by the law.”⁹⁰ Instead, **this righteousness⁹¹ is given through faith in Jesus Christ⁹² to all who believe** (vs. 22; *cf.* Romans 10:12).

⁸⁶ Denney, James, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament—St. Paul’s Epistle To The Romans*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979 reprint, pg. 608.

⁸⁷ Luther quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 218.

⁸⁸ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 219.

⁸⁹ The tense of the Greek verb (perfect) references that the act of making known God’s provision in Christ is complete, but its affects are continuously ongoing and continuously available for acceptance.

⁹⁰ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 177.

⁹¹ **This righteousness** again references God declaring one innocent in Christ.

⁹² That is, through a personal, proper response directed toward Christ and His atoning work.

Summarizing the plight that he had previously elaborated in detail, Paul notes why the need for the gospel—**for all⁹³ have sinned and fall short of the glory of God⁹⁴** (vs. 23)—but this time with a slightly different spin, emphasizing not the wrong human beings do but the good they miss in sinning.

- *Our sin causes us to lose the benefits of the glory of God. When we sin, we think in terms of the punishment we should receive. From God’s perspective, He thinks in terms of the dimensions of His glory which we have failed to enjoy. It is not so much the bad we do as the good we are missing that occupies God’s thoughts.⁹⁵*

Sin, then, robs us from experiencing the Person of God and from being like Him in whose image we were created.

Having noted that **this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe** (vs. 22), Paul returns to this concept by noting—**all are justified freely by His grace⁹⁶ through the redemption⁹⁷ that came by Christ Jesus** (vs. 24). **Justified** comes from the same Greek root as the noun translated **righteousness**, indicating that justification is the legal reality of being acquitted by God from one’s sins.⁹⁸ Exactly why God **presented Christ...through the shedding of His blood** (vs. 25) to make this righteousness possible is debated in biblical scholarship. Because the Greek word used to describe what Christ was presented as is used several ways in the LXX and the New Testament (*hilasterion*), the question is, “Was Christ presented as a **propitiation** (ESV; NKJV), as an **expiation** (RSV) or as a **sacrifice of atonement** (TNIV; NRSV)?” In other words, is Paul emphasizing Christ’s sacrificial death was to appease divine wrath (**propitiation**); to remove human guilt (**expiation**); or to provide covering and forgiveness of sin...the counter-part to the Old Testament mercy seat (**a sacrifice of**

⁹³ “Jews may have the law and circumcision; Americans may lay claim to a great religious heritage; ‘good’ people may point to their works of charity; but all this makes no essential difference to one’s standing before the righteous and holy God” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 226).

⁹⁴ **The glory of God** defines who He is...His essence and all that represents.

⁹⁵ Pickerill, Donald, *The Reign of Grace*, unpublished manuscript, New Hope Christian College, Eugene, OR, 2003 edition, pp. 35-36.

⁹⁶ Or **by His grace as a gift** (NRSV).

⁹⁷ **Redemption** refers to liberation from slavery and harkens back to God’s release of Israel from Egypt.

⁹⁸ As Romans develops further, we see that this legal acquittal is intended to lead to moral transformation. “Justification is indeed basic for Paul, but it is not the whole of what God does for us in Christ, and ‘we cannot receive righteousness in Christ without at the same time laying hold on sanctification’ (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 95).

atonement)?⁹⁹ It may be that Paul intended all three nuances be understood, with a contextual emphasis on appeasing the divine wrath with which he began (Romans 1:18). “The *hilasterion* which God has provided in Christ not only removes the ungodliness and wickedness, but at the same time averts the retribution which is the inevitable sequel to such attitudes and actions in a moral universe.”¹⁰⁰

God (the clear Initiator in so presenting Christ) **did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished** (vs. 25). In other words, because of Christ God can dole out the fullest implications of people rejecting His offer of righteousness in Christ (present and eschatological wrath), something He somewhat withheld against the Jews as a people group by not completely giving up on them as a covenant people and by occasionally relenting of His fullest intention to destroy them as His covenant nation (*cf.* Exodus 32:14; I Chronicles 21:15).

ROMANS 3:27-31—

Paul’s final concern in chapter 3 actually starts a larger section (Romans 3:27-4:25) in which he elaborates “the nature and implications of faith as the sole means of justification...*sola fide*...[is] a hallmark of the Reformation—[for] ‘faith alone’ is the means by which a person can be brought into relationship with the God of the Bible.”¹⁰¹ Resuming the diatribe, in these verses Paul notes three initial implications of *sola fide*.

- Faith alone means **boasting...is excluded** (vv. 27-28). By **boasting**, Paul means satisfaction in human effort and achievement as a means of salvation, with overtones of actually believing one is pleasing God with such achievement. “Some such pride is the besetting sin of all religious people, no matter what their religion.”¹⁰² “Paul’s rejection of boasting is motivated...by the fact that it violates the divine glory and brings man into dependence on the [sinful nature].”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ “Just where we stand today with respect to the interpretation of *hilasterion* in Rom 3:25a remains somewhat confusing and a bit difficult to spell out with precision” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 429).

¹⁰⁰ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 100.

¹⁰¹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 243.

¹⁰² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 185.

¹⁰³ Bultmann quoted in Morris, *loc. cit.*

- Faith alone means **God is the God of Jews...[and] Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith** (vv. 29-30).
- Faith alone means we **uphold the law**¹⁰⁴ (vs. 31), that is, what Paul teaches is not inconsistent with the law, but rather allows us to gain insight into its truest intent (*cf.* Romans 7-8; Matthew 5:17-18). There is a place for the law (**do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all** [vs. 31])...just not as the way of salvation.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ “Perhaps if Law were written with a capital letter, it would suggest the true meaning. The Apostle speaks as from the consciousness of a Jewish objector: is all that we have ever called Law—the whole Jewish religion—...made void by faith?” (James Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 614).

¹⁰⁵ **Rather, we uphold the law** “implies that, while people are justified without having to observe the law, nevertheless there is a sense in which the law is fulfilled in the lives of the justified who live according to the Spirit” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 199).

ROMANS 4:1-8—

As a sort of commentary on Romans 3:27-31, Paul now turns to a major example in Jewish thought who, despite Judaism’s understanding,¹⁰⁶ exemplifies the principle of *sola fide*—**Abraham, the forefather of us Jews** (vs. 1). “Abraham provides a crucial test case, since he was characteristically understood within Judaism as the archetype of the devout Jew who demonstrated his faithfulness to the covenant by keeping the law and who thus was reckoned righteous.”¹⁰⁷ Paul’s rhetorical question that harkens back to Romans 3:27-31—**what then shall we say that Abraham...discovered in this matter?** (vs. 1)—clearly implies the response, “Abraham discovered that he was **justified by faith apart from observing the law** (Romans 3:28)” and his **but not before God** (vs. 2) in terms of a possible boast by Abraham emphatically puts the entire argument of justification by works in the realm of impossibility, for “it is unthinkable that anyone, even Abraham, could have matter for boasting in God’s presence.”¹⁰⁸

Because it is hugely important to Paul to “maintain the continuity between the gospel and his central faith,”¹⁰⁹ he cites Genesis 15:6 as proof of the principle of *sola fide* in Abraham’s life—**what does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”** (vs. 3). Abraham did not perform some great meritorious work, but “simply received/trusted God” and was thereby declared in right standing before Him (*cf.* Romans 10:10).

Vv. 4-8 further develop how one being declared righteous excludes any appeal to works. Firstly, Paul uses an analogous contrast—**now to anyone who works, their wages are not credited to them as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to anyone**

¹⁰⁶ **If** (Greek, *ei*) in Romans 4:2 is basically tantamount to **because** and is used by Paul to reflect not the truth but the rabbinic belief that **in fact, Abraham was justified by works**.

¹⁰⁷ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 196. Says Moo, “The Jewish interpretation of Abraham stressed his works as the essence of his piety and the basis for his extraordinary, exemplary relationship to God” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 260). Note also Kruse, “What the apostle has to show is that, contrary to Jewish tradition, Abraham was justified by his faith and not because of his meritorious obedience” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-202).

¹⁰⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 195.

¹⁰⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 226.

who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited¹¹⁰ as righteousness (vv. 4-5). What rightly happens in the work world (**works... wages...obligation**) is not what rightly happens with God (**trusts...justifies the ungodly¹¹¹...faith is credited**). *God does not give out paychecks for justification.* Justification cannot be earned; if it could Abraham would have earned it and he did not. “That God acts toward his creatures graciously—without compulsion or necessity—is one of Paul’s nonnegotiable theological axioms.”¹¹² Secondly, Paul gives a “side glance” to David and a parallel truth he sees in Psalm 32:1-2 that supports his conclusion—**“blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed are those whose sin the Lord will never count¹¹³ against them”** (vv. 7-8). To not have sins counted against you is the same as having righteousness credited to you; “they are two sides of the same coin.”¹¹⁴ The link in Paul’s understanding is clearly between faith and crediting, not works and crediting.

ROMANS 4:9-12—

Paul now swings the argument back to his key text (Genesis 15:6)—**we have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness** (vs. 9). What he must now establish is the place of circumcision in the event of Abraham being credited as righteous,¹¹⁵ because, in as much as how Abraham was credited as righteous is paradigmatic, much is at stake—**is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised¹¹⁶** (vs. 1)? Paul’s argument is simple and straightforward. If one will follow the simple chronology of Genesis—**under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before?** (vs. 10)—they will clearly discover that **it was not after, but before!** (vs. 10); **Abraham’s faith...credited to him as righteousness** (vs. 9) was at least fourteen years before and perhaps as long as twenty-

¹¹⁰ **Accounted for** (NKJV); **reckoned as** (RSV).

¹¹¹ **Ungodly** references one who refuses to worship, clearly showing that godliness is not an antecedent to justification.

¹¹² Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 263.

¹¹³ **Count** translates the same Greek verb (*logizomai*) translated **credited** in Romans 4:3.

¹¹⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 199.

¹¹⁵ See above as to why Paul must yet again wrestle with the circumcision issue, even as the apostles did in Acts 15.

¹¹⁶ **Circumcised** and **uncircumcised** are again euphemisms for people groups.

nine years before he was circumcised. What this means is that circumcision was never intended to be the *means* to being credited as righteous that it had become in Judaism, but rather it was **a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised** (vs. 11).¹¹⁷ Circumcision attests...it does not create.

- *Circumcision, therefore, has no independent value. It cannot effect one's entrance into the people of God; nor does it even 'mark' a person as belonging to God's people apart from a prior justifying act...Jews who follow their biblical paradigm will place the proper value on their circumcision: as a mark of a relationship they enjoy with the Lord through their faith rather than as a visa that will automatically insure their entrance into heaven.*¹¹⁸

Paul also notes there is a divine purpose behind circumcision not being the means by which Abraham was credited as righteous—**the purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised...[even as he is] the father of the circumcised who...also follow the example of the faith** (vv. 11-12 [RSV]). If Abraham's justification were in any way the result of his being circumcised, then he (whose life is to be universally emulated) could not be the father of all believers.

ROMANS 4:13-17—

Paul continues his exposition of *sola fide* by now referencing the fact that **Abraham... received the promise**¹¹⁹ **that he would be heir of the world...through the righteousness that comes by faith** (vs. 13)...contra the Jewish belief that it came **through the law** (vs. 13, *i.e.*, by doing/keeping the demands of the Mosaic law). This is important to his argument because if the Jewish belief were correct, then one could participate in the promise only by taking on “the yoke of the Torah.” “Paul is still rushing on...just as Abraham's acceptance by faith was independent of circumcision, so

¹¹⁷ It is never biblically explained why God chose this particular seal. Pickerill's explanation merits consideration. “Why did God circumcise the male reproductive organ? It was to show that at the center of man's life, his organ of reproduction of life, he is indeed dead. By actually removing a part of the male reproductive organ God showed man that he must cut off attempts to reproduce life, for without God man cannot do so. We may think we can do it, but God says to cut it off!” (Don Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 45).

¹¹⁸ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 269, 271.

¹¹⁹ **The promise** references Genesis 12:3, “**All peoples on earth will be blessed through you**” (see also Genesis 18:18) which the New Testament understands to mean, “Blessing comes to humankind through the gospel and all believers have a part in spreading that message.”

it was independent of the Mosaic law,”¹²⁰ which he notes in Galatians 3:17 was not even introduced for 430 years.

Further elaborating on who are heirs of this promise, Paul notes that if the promise goes to legalists, to those who “rely on the law to be the *heirs*”¹²¹ (again, as the Jews assumed regarding Abraham), then **faith means nothing and the promise is worthless** (vs. 14). Why? Precisely because “if it is the case that the inheritance is to be based on adherence to the law, then there will be no heirs, because no fallen human being can adequately adhere to the law—and that means that faith is exercised in vain and the promise will never be fulfilled.”¹²²

Regarding the law that was seen as virtually salvific among the Jews and the means whereby one secured the promise, Paul notes that in reality the exact opposite is true—**the law brings wrath** (vs. 15). Far from saving and propelling us into receiving the promise, “law inevitably implies penalties for failure to keep it”¹²³ and further serves to seal the condemnation of those under it—**where there is no law there is no transgression** (vs. 15). “By stating clearly, and in great detail, exactly what God requires of people, the law renders people even more accountable to God than they were without the law.”¹²⁴

Paul concludes this section with the positive summarizing statement that **the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace**¹²⁵ **and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring**¹²⁶ and reminds us again that **to those who have the faith of Abraham...he is [their] father in the sight of God** (vv. 16-17). He also mentions that the God behind **the promise...by faith...by grace is the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not** (vs. 17), reminding us of our total dependence on Him, even as justification by grace through faith exhibits our total dependence.

¹²⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 205.

¹²¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 206.

¹²² Calvin quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 275.

¹²³ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 111. “Those who rely solely upon their ethnicity and their observance of the law to qualify them for a share in the inheritance are sadly mistaken” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 214).

¹²⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 277.

¹²⁵ **Grace** on God’s part correlates to **faith** on people’s.

¹²⁶ “This is the Divine purpose in instituting the spiritual order of grace and faith: it is the only one consistent with universalism in religion” (James Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 619).

ROMANS 4:18-25—

Paul's concluding paragraph continues in the same basic vein 1) by developing important historical aspects in which Abraham received the promise by faith (tying it into hope and noting that **being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised...is why "it was credited to him as righteousness"** [vv. 21-22]) and 2) by making application of Abraham to the readers of Romans—**God will credit righteousness [also to] us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead** (vs. 24).

The historical setting in which Abraham received and embraced the promise that his offspring (*none* of whom had yet been born) would be multitudinous (Genesis 15:5) was that of **fac[ing] the fact that his body was as good as dead¹²⁷—since he was about a hundred years old—and...Sarah's womb was also dead** (vs. 19). This called for him to **in hope believe...against all hope** (vs. 18), that is, to cling to God's clear spoken promise in the midst of an obviously different reality at the human level. There was no denying of reality, but neither would reality be the last word in that God's Word countered it.¹²⁸ His clinging to this promise **strengthened...his faith** and resulted in his giving **glory to God** (vs. 20).¹²⁹ "The strength of his faith was precisely his recognition that there was nothing in him which could make the fulfillment of the promise possible, his recognition, that is to say, that he had to rely wholly and solely on God who alone can give life to that which is dead, who alone can make something out of nothing."¹³⁰ "God took a weak Abraham and put strength into him."¹³¹

Knowledge of the full Genesis account shows that Paul's statements **without weakening in his faith...[and] he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God** (vs. 19-20) do not mean Abraham had no struggles. He had momentary hesitations "but he avoided a deep-seated and permanent attitude of distrust and

¹²⁷ **As good as dead** for procreation.

¹²⁸ "We note here that Abraham's faith is not described as a 'leap into the dark,' a completely baseless, almost irrational 'decision'—as Christian faith is pictured by some 'existentialist' theologians—but as a 'leap' from the evidence of his senses into the security of God's word and promise" (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-283). Note also that his faith was strengthened amidst adversity.

¹²⁹ To give **glory to God** is to ascribe to Him that which He rightly deserves; here Abraham stands in direct contrast to those in Romans 1:21 who **although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him**.

¹³⁰ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 238.

¹³¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 212.

inconsistency in relationship to God and his promises...unlike the ‘double-souled’ person who displays a deeply rooted division in his attitude toward God (Jas. 1:6-8)”¹³²

Again, all of **this is why “it was credited to him as righteousness”** (vs. 22).

As noted above, vv. 23-25 make universal application of the truth of *sola fide* as modeled in Abraham—the words **“it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will [also] credit righteousness** (vv. 23-24). To Paul, this is the self-evident implication of the paradigmatic Genesis 15:6. “It is the paradigm of Abraham’s faith as just expounded which Paul now seeks to impress upon his readers—Abraham’s faith as the archetype of Christian belief in (relation to) Jesus.”¹³³ Paul’s note that God **raised Jesus our Lord from the dead** (vs. 24) not only ties the truth of vs. 17—**God gives life to the dead**—with the state of Sarah’s womb at the time of the promise—**Sarah’s womb was dead** (vs. 19)—but also ties Jesus in as a descendant of the fruit of her “resurrected” womb. “What gave unique and absolute significance to Abraham’s begetting, and Sarah’s bearing, of Isaac was the fact that it was of this child that Christ Himself was eventually to be a descendant according to His humanity.”¹³⁴

Paul’s closing sentence—**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification** (vs. 25)¹³⁵—reminds us that whereas Abraham’s faith unto justification was in a somewhat “nebulous promise,” our justification is the result of faith in a very clear reality. “Christ was ‘delivered up’ to atone for his people’s sins and raised to guarantee their justification.”¹³⁶

¹³² Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285. “Paul preferred to highlight only Abraham’s more thoughtful and settled response to God and God’s promise, which he evidently felt characterized Abraham’s life much more than his initial response (in Genesis 17)” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 520).

¹³³ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 239. Note also Moo’s observation of Paul’s argument in Romans 3-4. “Christians share with Abraham the same basis for justification—faith—and the same God as the object of that faith...a faith that is *apart from works, apart from circumcision, apart from the law, apart from sight*—and therefore a ‘reckoning’ that is solely a matter of *grace*” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 287).

¹³⁴ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 251.

¹³⁵ Paul’s language in this verse is based on the LXX version of Isaiah 53 with its Suffering Servant implications.

¹³⁶ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 113. In reflecting on the biblical theology of Romans 4, Longenecker notes three important matters in the chapter—“Paul’s understanding of the ‘continuity and development in the course of God’s program of redemption’...the vitally important subject of righteousness as a ‘gift of God’...and the more developed nuances that this passage reveals with respect to Paul’s understanding of ‘faith’” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 524).

ROMANS 5:1-11¹³⁷—

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith (vs. 1) indicates that Paul is now moving on to some results of what he has been teaching from Romans 1:18-4:25, especially results of justification.¹³⁸ “Having set out God’s way of justifying sinners, and established it on scriptural basis, Paul now lists the blessings which accrue to those whose faith has been counted to them as righteousness.”¹³⁹ He also expounds on important aspects of Christ’s death, doing so from more of a confessional style than the polemical style (diatribe) he has been using.

The first result is **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ** (vs. 1). This peace is positional, that is, justification moves one from being a recipient of God’s wrath to being His friend. “The thought is that—in the case of the divine justification of sinners—justification necessarily involves reconciliation...so God’s justification of sinners of necessity involves also their reconciliation, the removal of enmity, the establishment of peace...they now live as God’s friends.”¹⁴⁰ With this peace and reconciliation come **access**¹⁴¹ **by faith into this grace in which we now stand** (vs. 2), that is, we participate in the fullness of His kingdom life. Paul then exults or expresses confidence in the “happy certainty” (Phillips) or “confident expectation” (Cranfield) he has in the God on whom we are totally dependent and to whom we trust our future—**and we boast**¹⁴² **in the hope of the glory of God** (vs. 2).¹⁴³

¹³⁷ “This begins a long section (5:1-8:39). Paul spells out the blessings of salvation enjoyed by those whom God justifies. They have peace with God and rejoice in hope of sharing his glory. They are able to rejoice in suffering knowing that God uses even this to develop character...the section concludes with a great emotive climax celebrating the love of God in Christ for all believers” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 224).

¹³⁸ “While mindful of the danger of oversystematizing and of erecting barriers between sections so that the continuity of Paul’s argument is lost, Paul *is* arguing, and arguing *theologically*; therefore, it is quite appropriate to look for transitions in that argument. While we must not draw too heavy a line between chaps. 4 and 5, the progress of Paul’s argument reveals a transition in topic at this point” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 291).

¹³⁹ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 113.

¹⁴⁰ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

¹⁴¹ The Greek word (*prosagoge*) references the privilege of approaching a person of royalty.

¹⁴² Or **rejoice** (RSV; ESV).

¹⁴³ **The hope we have of sharing God’s glory** (TEV), of sharing “God-like-ness.”

Paul next expands this concept of dependence on and trust in God and what life with Him entails by noting—**not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings** (vs. 3). **Sufferings** reference any distress from outward or inward circumstances or turmoil; any frustration or evil that characterizes this age. **Not only so...but also** makes a level playing field of rejoicing in the glory of God and sufferings. “For Paul such suffering is not an antithesis to the believers’ experience of acceptance by God, rather its complement; such suffering does not contradict or prevent their standing in the grace of God, but rather is the condition in which that grace is experienced in its greatest strength.”¹⁴⁴ But this perspective does not come in a vacuum; there is a reason for it (**because we know**) and if one bypasses understanding that reason, they will be left “raw by life with God” and feel God is back to being their enemy.

The understanding that one must have is that **sufferings** are part of the process of spiritual maturity, of being **conformed to the image of His Son** (Romans 8:29). It is through the Spirit working in believers in the midst of difficulties/stresses that **sufferings produce perseverance** (steadfastness; spiritual fortitude); **perseverance [produces] character** (documented Christ-like substance in one’s life); **and character [produces strengthened] hope** (vv. 3-4). “As Calvin points out, tribulation ‘provokes a great part of mankind to murmur against God, and even to curse Him’. But Paul is here thinking of what it achieves, when it is met by faith in God which receives it as God’s fatherly discipline.”¹⁴⁵ “The whole process produces hope because for Paul it is itself the process of salvation, the process whereby God recreates humanity in his own image.”¹⁴⁶

In keeping with such Old Testament passages as Psalm 22:6—**in You they trusted and were not disappointed**—and Psalm 25:3—**no one who hopes in You will ever be put to shame**—Paul continues with the major thought of **hope** by noting that Christian **hope does not put us to shame**¹⁴⁷ (vs. 5). Christian hope is not illusory; it does what it promises, including guaranteeing that our current justification will “hold” on the Day of Judgment and that we are being changed into God-like-ness (*cf.* vs. 2). This confidence (this motivation) is grounded in the fact that **God’s love [for us] has been poured out**

¹⁴⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 264.

¹⁴⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 261.

¹⁴⁶ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 265.

¹⁴⁷ Or **does not disappoint us** (NRSV; NIV).

into our hearts¹⁴⁸ **through the Holy Spirit**,¹⁴⁹ **who has been given to us** (vs. 5). It is hugely important to note that in addition to the assurance Scripture gives us into the surety of our salvation, Paul adds this important inner, subjective witness. We must embrace God’s love for us conveyed to our senses by the Holy Spirit if we are going to be fully sustained by hope.

Vv. 6-8 further develop the nature of God’s love for us (**you see; for** [NRSV; ESV]; **seeing that** [Cranfield]). It is not a matter of “God helps those that help themselves” but rather—**when we were still powerless**,¹⁵⁰ **Christ died for the ungodly...[that is] God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (vv. 6, 8).¹⁵¹ God’s love is shown in Jesus’ death and “reflection on the significance of Jesus’ death should confirm the testimony of [our] own hearts, since it is the same love at work in both cases.”¹⁵² Furthermore, Christ’s death for **the ungodly...sinners** was not only unexpected, but it has virtually no human parallel, our giving of ourselves for another human being limited only to someone close to us or someone who deserves it¹⁵³—**very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die** (vs. 7).¹⁵⁴

Vv. 9-11 are what is known as a “causal sequence” (introduced by Greek *οὖν*), whereby Paul restates and expands implications of our hope introduced in vv. 1-8, using the argument style of “from the greater to the lesser”—**since we have now been justified by His blood**,¹⁵⁵ **how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath**¹⁵⁶ **through Him!**

¹⁴⁸ Or **has flooded our hearts**.

¹⁴⁹ “The Spirit is the hidden channel through which the flood of divine love sustains its flow” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 266).

¹⁵⁰ That is, lacking any capacity to solve the matter of enmity between us and God that made us subject to His wrath.

¹⁵¹ **At just the right time** (Romans 5:6) is either a reference to Galatians 4:4 (**when the set time had fully come**) or it means something like, “At the time of greatest need, when nothing but his death would help” (F.F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 117).

¹⁵² Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 266.

¹⁵³ This is to be taken as a general maxim.

¹⁵⁴ The TNIV (and most major English translations) sees these two clauses as concessive, with the distinction between **a righteous person** and **a good person** likely being “**a good person** would be one for whom we have a strong personal attachment and for whom, therefore, we would be more willing to die” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 308).

¹⁵⁵ Justifying and reconciling sinners would be seen as the greater of the two difficulties.

¹⁵⁶ **God’s wrath** here is His eschatological wrath, and **shall we be saved** here references our final deliverance from that wrath.

For if,¹⁵⁷ while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! (vv. 9-10). Vs. 11 closes the section with a summation, emphasizing that **we boast** not only **in the hope of the glory of God** (vs. 2) and **in our sufferings** (vs. 3), **but we also boast in God¹⁵⁸ through our Lord Jesus Christ** (vs. 11). “The sensitive reader would catch the implication that the sentence completes the sequence of argument begun in chap. 2 with the indictment of Jewish pride...the crucial difference is that Paul now describes it as boasting ‘through our Lord Jesus Christ’—not a boasting in the law.”¹⁵⁹

ROMANS 5:12-21—

Often referred to as “the history of humanity as a drama in two parts,” Paul begins a new section here that is a conclusion (**therefore** [vs. 1]) of either Romans 5:1-11; Romans 5:11; or Romans 1:18-5:11. Scholars differ in their analyses. “Paul is linking this new section to the preceding (however delineated). It is because of the reconciliation Christ has brought about that the evil Adam introduced into the world has been overcome, and more than overcome (cf. v. 20).”¹⁶⁰

There are several difficulties in this section, including the fact that Paul’s thought begun in vs. 12 is interrupted until vs. 18.¹⁶¹ What is clear, however, is that Paul is giving “the universal foundational story of sin, death, and human depravity, which have been countered by God’s grace as expressed through the ‘obedience’ and ‘righteousness’ of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶²

Paul begins by taking us back to Genesis 3, noting how sin and the resultant death came to be part of God’s originally “very good” creation—**sin¹⁶³ entered the world through**

¹⁵⁷ **If** (Greek *ei*) is again tantamount to **because**, introducing a premise Paul deems undeniably clear—**we were God’s enemies** at the time of our reconciliation.

¹⁵⁸ Or **we rejoice in God** (ESV).

¹⁵⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 269.

¹⁶⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 228. Kruse sees Paul’s **therefore** functioning “uncharacteristically, as a transitional phrase” rather than in its normative function “to bring out the implications of something he has just said” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 240).

¹⁶¹ Note the parenthesis of Romans 5:13-17 in NKJV.

¹⁶² Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 582.

¹⁶³ “Paul personifies ‘sin’ as a malevolent force that both is hostile to God and alienates human beings from God” (Richard Longenecker, *ibid.*, pg. 586).

one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people (vs. 12). Though not named until vs. 14, **one man** is clearly Adam (whose name means, “Humanity”).¹⁶⁴ **Sin entered the world** is Paul’s way of saying that sin existed before Adam, but “Adam’s one sinful act released into the world a new baleful power, called sin.”¹⁶⁵ The fact that **death [entered the world] through sin** refers to both physical and spiritual death and indicates that death used sin as its entry point, with the result that **death came to all people**. Again, Kruse, “Paul is not thinking of the result of sin in respect to Adam only, but of the power of death unleashed into the world as a result of his sin, a power that afflicts all people.”¹⁶⁶

Paul’s causal clause at the end of vs. 12—**because¹⁶⁷ all sinned¹⁶⁸**—has been a point of great debate throughout Church history. Does it mean that “all sinned in and with Adam”;¹⁶⁹ that Adam “corrupted, vitiated, depraved, and ruined our nature...we have, therefore, all sinned, because we are all imbued with natural corruption”;¹⁷⁰ or that “we all follow Adam’s example, but our sin is our own.”¹⁷¹ Of these, the first is likely the best explanation, based among other factors on the tense of the Greek verb translated **sinned**.¹⁷² Note, however, Moo’s observation. “Why do people so consistently turn from good to evil of all kinds? Paul affirms in this passage that human solidarity in the sin of Adam is the explanation—and whether we explain this solidarity in terms of sinning in

¹⁶⁴ Although Paul’s reference is to the male person Adam, he is “using the figure of Adam more as a universal personage in a manner that Gentiles could readily identify with...he is presenting his own version of Gen 3 in a universalistic manner” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 583-584).

¹⁶⁵ Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 241.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* “Modern scholars have usually not attempted to explicate much further Paul’s articular use of *the death* in 5:12. Reformation commentators, however, frequently spoke of ‘the death’ that resulted...as *inherited depravity*, which became the basis for every person’s sins and personal guilt” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 587).

¹⁶⁷ Or **on the basis of which** or **with the result that**.

¹⁶⁸ Or **have sinned** (NRSV).

¹⁶⁹ This is the doctrine of Federal Headship or Human Solidarity, from which comes the doctrine of original sin. “Paul believed in ‘original sin’ in the sense that Adam’s sin constituted all people sinners...the entire race is one with Adam, and his sin and death is the sin and death of the entire race...[because] in Adam, all sinned...people are not sinners merely because they do sinful acts; they are sinners in Adam” (George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament—Revised Edition*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000 reprint, pg. 443. “For Paul, Adam...was a corporate figure, whose sin could be regarded at the same time as the sin of all his descendants” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 328).

¹⁷⁰ Calvin quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 231.

¹⁷¹ Morris, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷² “The constative use of the third-person aorist indicative verb (‘have sinned’) signals the actual sins of individual people throughout the course of human history” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 590).

and with Adam or because of a corrupt nature inherited from him does not matter at this point.”¹⁷³

As noted, Paul now abandons his sentence until vs. 18, bringing in first the matter of the Mosaic law—**to be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given** (vs. 13)—so as “to assert the truly universal character of sin’s and death’s dominance: sin and death exercise their power independently of the law—that is, over the whole world of humankind without distinction of Jew and Gentile.”¹⁷⁴ He then emphasizes sin as power rather than act, “that force which functions as the antecedent to particular acts of sin, that [universal] power which man experiences influencing his desires and choices,”¹⁷⁵ whether one has a clear commandment like Adam to violate or not—**sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the One to come**¹⁷⁶ (vv. 13-14).

Paul’s concluding statement in vs. 14—**Adam...is a pattern of the One to come**—prompts a comparison of both as epochal figures with radically different decisive acts (vv. 15-17). These verses, therefore, serve as a sort of segue to Paul completing the thought of vs. 12 in vv. 18ff. In so doing, he picks up the **how much more** motif of Romans 5:9-10.

The first contrast is between **the gift** and **the trespass** (clearly...**the one man’s sin** [vv. 15-16]). **The trespass of the one man** caused **the many** to die, whereas **God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ...overflow to the many...[bringing] eternal life!** (vv. 15, 21).¹⁷⁷ The second contrast notes the gracious nature of **the gift of God—the judgment followed one sin...but the gift followed many trespasses** (vs. 16, emphases mine). Far from causing God to withdraw, the

¹⁷³ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 329. Notes Kruse, “There is now a tendency among a number of scholars...to identify a primary and a secondary cause for human beings becoming subject to death. The primary cause is Adam’s disobedience...and the secondary cause is the sin of disobedience of all human beings, who likewise bring death upon themselves” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 242). See Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 575ff for the latest arguments on the complexities of Romans 5:12-21 among New Testament scholars.

¹⁷⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 291.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Some scholars think **the One to come** may have been a familiar messianic title.

¹⁷⁷ “Adam did his descendants a grievous wrong, but Christ gave his people an abundant gift. He not only reversed the effects of Adam’s sin, but brought an abundance of positive blessings: he brought a whole new life” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236).

multitudinous trespasses occasioned God's provision. "That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment, this is perfectly understandable: that the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God's free gift, this is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension."¹⁷⁸ The third contrast, similar to the first, notes that **the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation,¹⁷⁹ but the gift ...brought justification** (vs. 16).

Vs. 17 then summarizes the two epochs, noting yet another contrast—**death reigned through that one man...[but] those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one Man, Jesus Christ!**¹⁸⁰ **Reigned** translates a Greek verbal tense that has the idea of "began to reign."¹⁸¹ "Though the sentence of death was not pronounced at any moment in time, yet, like the sword of Damocles, it is suspended over our heads at every moment."¹⁸² **Reign in life**¹⁸³ references both current and eschatological experiencing of God's life. "Without denying that [the eschatological future referenced] is involved, and may even be the primary emphasis, it may be that this 'reigning in life' begins with the reception of the gift of righteousness."¹⁸⁴

As noted, vs. 18 picks up and rounds off the comparison and contrast between Christ and Adam (**consequently**)¹⁸⁵ that Paul left incomplete in vs. 12. Of key theological importance is Paul's **one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all** (vs. 18). Is Paul teaching "universal justification for all people"¹⁸⁶ even as condemnation is universal? Note Moo—

¹⁷⁸ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 338.

¹⁷⁹ **Condemnation** denotes punishment, especially eschatological punishment.

¹⁸⁰ Please note that this must be received whereas death is inherited. "The new age is characterized not by the rule of a fate one cannot escape (like death) but by the willing reception of a grace freely offered... death can only be outwitted for those who yield again their submission as creatures to the creator, in dependence on whom alone life can be sustained despite death" (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 295).

¹⁸¹ This is technically known as "ingressive aorist."

¹⁸² Barth quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 237.

¹⁸³ **Or exercise dominion in life** [NRSV].

¹⁸⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 340.

¹⁸⁵ **Therefore** (NRSV).

¹⁸⁶ This teaches that "some people are justified by faith in this life, but those who do not accept the offer of God in this life are nevertheless assured of being justified at the judgment" (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 342).

- *Such universalistic thinking is, naturally, very appealing—who likes the idea that many people will be consigned to the eternal punishment of hell? But if, as seems clear, many texts plainly teach the reality of such punishment for those who do not embrace Christ by faith in this life...[then] those who advocate such a viewpoint are guilty of picking and choosing their evidence...[we must therefore remember] the point for which Paul is arguing in this passage. This point is that there can be an assurance of justification and life, on one side, that is just as strong and certain as the assurance of condemnation on the other. Paul wants to show, not how Christ has made available righteousness and life for all, but how Christ has secured the benefits of that righteousness for all who belong to Him.*¹⁸⁷

Paul's introduction of **the law** (vs. 20) at first seems unexpected, until we remember that he is both summarizing key concepts he has taught (and the law has been a topic of importance) and segueing to a complex contrast of law and grace. By way of summation, Paul notes that **the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase** ([vs. 20]; *cf.* Romans 3:20), that is, the law clarifies sin for humankind, but it is not able to alter the human state; as a matter of fact, we will see in Romans 7 that the law actually antagonizes sin (*cf.* **the power of sin is the law** [1 Corinthians 15:56]). By way of a segue to what will become a lengthy discussion of law and grace in Romans 6-8, Paul states that **where sin increased,¹⁸⁸ grace increased all the more,¹⁸⁹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord** (vv. 20-21). Because of Christ's death and resurrection, grace overwhelms the effects of sin. "Grace is so much more effective than evil"¹⁹⁰...or put more crudely, "You cannot out sin the grace of God." And the purpose of grace increasing all the more? **So that...grace might reign...to bring eternal life** (vs. 21). "Grace triumphs when God imputes righteousness and this leads to eternal life, the end or aim of it all."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-343. "The universalism of God's grace...has to do with what God has provided on behalf of all people. It does not, however...assure inevitability, but rather speaks of what God has graciously provided, to which people need to respond positively" (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 601).

¹⁸⁸ "It increased in the sense that actions that had always been sinful were now clearly defined by the law as such" (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 253).

¹⁸⁹ Paul is deliberately superlative here (*cf.* **grace abounded all the more** [NRSV]). **Sin didn't, and doesn't, have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace** (The Message).

¹⁹⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 242.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* See also note #163 above.

ROMANS 6:1-14—

“Paul is here concerned to insist that justification has inescapable moral implications, that our righteous status before God involves an absolute obligation to seek righteousness of life, that to imagine that we can ‘receive righteousness in Christ without at the same time laying hold on sanctification’ is a profane absurdity.”¹⁹² The entire section has to do with subduing the power of sin, of living out the promise of vs. 14—**sin shall no longer be your master,¹⁹³ because you are not under the law, but under grace.**

The exposition arises in “reply to the preposterous argument”¹⁹⁴ **shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?** (vs. 1; cf. Romans 3:8). Paul himself postulates this question being asked—**what shall we say then?** (vs. 1)—based on what he knows could be a false inference of Romans 5:20—**where sin increased, grace increased all the more.** In effect, it is saying that sin is good for the gospel, so why not continue with sin as a life-style so as to give grace an opportunity to shine?! “I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged.”¹⁹⁵

The basis of Paul’s response that strongly rejects this inference—**by no means!** (vs. 2)¹⁹⁶—is that there has been a positional change, a realm transfer if you would—**we are those who have died to sin** (vs. 2). “He is referring to the death to sin that marks the

¹⁹² Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 295.

¹⁹³ Or **sin will have no dominion over you** (NRSV).

¹⁹⁴ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 128. “What was their criticism? It was not just that Paul’s gospel of justification by grace through faith without works seemed to make the doing of good works otiose. Worse than that, it seemed to stimulate people to sin more than ever” (John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Romans—The Bible Speaks Today Commentary Series*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 1994, pp.166-167).

¹⁹⁵ W. H. Auden quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 356. Though perhaps “preposterous,” such an accusation against Paul’s teaching has merit. “The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The New Man—Exposition of Chapter 6*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1973, pg. 8).

¹⁹⁶ Or **God forbid** (KJV).

beginning of the characteristic Christian life,”¹⁹⁷ a positional separation from the ruling power of sin¹⁹⁸ that must then become actualized by each individual—**do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires** (vs. 12).¹⁹⁹ This realm transfer makes drawing one’s life from the old realm totally out of sync with who we now are—**how can we live in it any longer?** (vs. 2).²⁰⁰ “How can you who identified with Christ live as though Christ never died, as though sin...[was] still [a] dominating factor for present life?”²⁰¹

As noted, Paul will spend several verses unpacking the practical implications of this death to sin and how one comes to the point of sin not dominating. He will do so against the backdrop of coming out from under the law and living under grace, both of which occupy Romans 6-8. Though Paul has wrestled with why the need for justification (Romans 1:18-4:25), let’s further examine some of the effects of Adam’s action and give a more complete definition of the sin with which we wrestle (Romans 5:21).

By way of review, “Paul believed in ‘original sin’ in the sense that Adam’s sin constituted all people sinners.”²⁰² He sees humankind made up of two broad categories of people—**sinner**s and those **made righteous** (Romans 5:19—**just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous**). Paul here is referencing one’s legal standing before God—do you belong legally to Adam or to Christ?

- *When we ask who belongs to, or is “in,” Adam and Christ, respectively, Paul makes his answer clear: every person, without exception, is “in Adam” (cf. Romans 5:12D-14); but only those who “receive the gift” (vs. 17; “those who believe,” according to Rom. 1:16-5:11) are “in Christ”...people were really “made” sinners through Adam’s act of disobedience just as they are really “made righteous” through Christ’s obedience.*²⁰³

¹⁹⁷ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 247.

¹⁹⁸ Paul notes that this separation happened at our conversion-baptism (Romans 6:3-4).

¹⁹⁹ Comparing Romans 6:12 with Romans 6:14 shows that the imperative springs from the established indicative. The imperative does not establish the indicative. “In 6:12-13 Paul spells out in detail how [not letting sin reign] is to express itself in practical terms...vs. 12 makes it clear that believers’ death to sin does not mean that they are immune to temptation or incapable of falling into sin. It means that sin’s tyranny has been broken so they are free to choose not to sin, but they must continue to choose not to do so” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268).

²⁰⁰ **Or how can we draw our life from the realm of sin anymore?**

²⁰¹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 327.

²⁰² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 443.

²⁰³ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 343, 345.

- *The presupposition of the whole chain of reason in Romans 5:12-21 lies in the inclusion in the supra-individual situation of sin and death represented by Adam. Here again the basic structures of the Pauline theology are not individualizing, but redemptive-historical and corporate. It is a matter of two different modes of existence, that of the old and that of the new man, which are determined by two different aeons, and concerning which an all-embracing decision has been made in Adam and in Christ.*²⁰⁴

The matter of **through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners** (Romans 5:19) harkens back to the Fall (Genesis 3). There were many effects of the Fall, the first major effect being alienation from God. It is a key element in what Yahweh meant when He said to Adam, **“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will certainly die”** (Genesis 2:17). Paul is clear—without exception, all human beings born since the Fall belong to Adam, that is, they are by birth in a state of legal (forensic) separation from God and subject to His wrath—**all of us...lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature...[and] were by nature**²⁰⁵ **deserving of wrath**²⁰⁶ (Ephesians 2:3).²⁰⁷ *“Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people,* as Paul puts it in Rom. 5:18 (because all humanity was encapsulated in that one man), *is tantamount to saying that all human beings are inherently (‘by nature’) subject to condemnation.”*²⁰⁸

The second major effect of the Fall is that this legal position of separation manifests itself in humankind **instinctively follow[ing] the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient** (Ephesians 2:2).²⁰⁹

- *Humanity in comparison to God is seen as fallen, as sunk in sin, and therefore as hostile to God. In this way...humankind acquires overtones of evil. The world of humans is not evil per se, for human beings are God’s creatures and*

²⁰⁴ Ridderbos, Herman, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1977 printing, pg. 99.

²⁰⁵ **By nature** (Greek, *phusei*) means “by birth” (see Romans 2:14; Galatians 2:15).

²⁰⁶ **Deserving of wrath** derives from a Hebrew idiom meaning, “Worthy to receive divine judgment” (*cf.* 2 Samuel 12:5).

²⁰⁷ This does not mean that there is nothing left of the image of God in humankind, nor that humans are incapable of doing anything good or noteworthy (*cf.* Romans 2:14). See also note #221 below.

²⁰⁸ Bruce, F.F., *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984, pp. 284-285.

²⁰⁹ This sinful life-style is attributed by Paul largely to the dynamic of sin/the ethical flesh, which will be discussed below.

*God's work is good. But when people are viewed as they actually exist, they are seen in rebellion against God.*²¹⁰

The third major effect of the Fall affects all of creation—the creation was subjected to **futility, not of its own will but by the will of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God** (Romans 8:20-21 [RSV]). **Futility** (frustration [TNIV])²¹¹ references the judgment in Genesis 3:17-19, where God tells Adam that his disobedience will bring a curse upon the ground and much toil to humankind. **Futility** (Greek, *mataiotes*) has the idea of emptiness, purposelessness, frustration or folly. All of creation, including humankind, is unable to fulfill its designed purpose apart from the intervening, redemptive grace of God. Try as we might, without God and His grace we will never be able to experience the intended purpose for which we were created; life will ultimately crumble and there will always be feelings of void or vanity in all we do. With reference to humankind, such futility could lead, among other things, to a **depraved mind** (Romans 1:28) and manifest itself in such things as the twenty-one sociological evils and perversions Paul notes (Romans 1:29-31).

- *It is a dark list whose intent is to cause us to desire to follow after God. We will never walk in the Spirit until we know that the only other option is to walk in the futility of this creation which has as its “goals” those twenty-one items listed. We must come to see the absolute emptiness of the first creation and of ourselves or we will never turn to walk in the Spirit, to a walk in the new creation.*²¹²

Paul further states that this futility includes **bondage to decay** (Romans 8:21). Have you ever noticed how much of life eventually decays? Things quickly lose their newness; great civilizations crumble. This is why Jesus said, “**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal**” (Matthew 6:19) and why Paul told the Corinthians—**this world in its present form is passing away** (1 Corinthians 7:31). The total scheme of things as they now exist

²¹⁰ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 437.

²¹¹ Or **vanity** (KJV)

²¹² Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 77.

(including wonderful relationships [1 Corinthians 7:29-31]) is ultimately transitory and will never bring eternal satisfaction.²¹³

- *The structure of worldly relationships is transitory and is destined to pass away; and since Christians belong to the new and divine order, while they still find themselves in the world and must of necessity make use of the world, the goal of their lives must not be that of making the fullest use of this world, i.e., of finding their deepest motivations and satisfactions on the earthly, worldly level...Paul insists that the sources of one's true life stem from a higher level, and in the resources of this spiritual world and its objectives he or she finds the deepest meaning of existence.*²¹⁴

But Paul is not a fatalist. Please note the RSV—**God subjected it in hope** (Romans 8:20). Hope is the promise of a better future, a future when the judgment of futility will be lifted and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God arrives in consummation. We now experience only **the firstfruits of the Spirit** (Romans 8:23), but consummation is coming—I **consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us** (Romans 8:18). We must view futility and frustration in life from this eternal perspective. We cannot escape it and the **groan[ing] inwardly** that it produces (Romans 8:23), but we can groan from an eternal perspective—**wait[ing] for [the consummate kingdom] patiently** (Romans 8:25).²¹⁵

Now to a very important conclusion. The Fall deposited in humankind a sinful force referred to as *the flesh/sinful nature, I, the old self, the Adamic nature*. It is in the DNA of humanity. Of these, *flesh/sinful nature*²¹⁶ is Paul's most frequent term. Theologians term it the *ethical flesh* to distinguish it from Paul's other uses of *flesh*²¹⁷ (i.e., a synonym for the physical body [2 Corinthians 4:11]).²¹⁸ It is humankind before grace comes to us. This ethical flesh is personified in Paul, taking on a life of its own—**all of us also lived among [unbelievers] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts** (Ephesians 2:3). “Paul thinks of the flesh as a power

²¹³ Paul goes on to note that this futility and decay produce in us a **groaning** similar to that of a woman experiencing **the pains of childbirth** (Romans 8:22).

²¹⁴ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 438-439.

²¹⁵ Please note Paul's additional word of encouragement to us—**the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans** (Romans 8:26). The Spirit is “sighing/groaning” us toward the will of God.

²¹⁶ Greek, *sarx*.

²¹⁷ These contexts also use *sarx*.

²¹⁸ This is why the NIV and TNIV substitute “sinful nature” for “flesh” when used in ethical contexts.

which has got control of man, and there is a marked tendency to personification in his references to it.”²¹⁹

The ethical flesh is clearly identified with sin—**the acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity...** (Galatians 5:19).

- *Sin and the flesh are identified with each other: to be “in the flesh,” to be “carnal,” and the like mean to sin, indeed to be under the power of sin. This relationship of identity of sin and flesh is one of the most distinctive and radical data of Pauline anthropology. What is important for our present context is that there is here a new indication of the universality of sin, in that flesh on the one hand is a description of all that is man, and on the other of the sinful in man.*²²⁰

With reference to understanding the ethical flesh in believers, we must first understand that *conversion does not affect its presence or power*. Some believers falsely think that some goodness came to the essence of their personhood at salvation; they exert great effort and striving to find this alleged goodness. “Now that I’m saved, I must be a better person, so I had better start acting better.” But Paul is clear—I **know that good itself does not dwell in me,**²²¹ **that is, in my sarx** (Romans 7:18A). The essence of our personhood, of who we are in our historical self, was not “cleaned up” at conversion and it never will be. **Our flesh is unredeemable!** Stop looking for any good to come from your historical self; from your natural personality.

- *To begin let me state what I believe to be our biggest problem in this area, namely, that we do not adequately diagnose how lethal is our sin problem. Before anyone can be helped physically, emotionally, psychologically or spiritually there must be an adequate diagnosis. Paul knows this. He, therefore, through the rhetorical “I” autobiographically opens mankind’s heart and by the enabling of the Holy Spirit diagnoses the sin problem of all—we are desperately beyond hope. The natural human heart—the sinful*

²¹⁹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 191. NOTE: the views expressed here follow those of Augustine, the Latin Fathers, Martin Luther and John Calvin and in modern scholarship those of Cranfield, Dunn, Morris and Barrett. For alternate views, see Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 650-660. It also reflects the understanding of sanctification espoused by the British Keswick movement, especially as it influenced certain Pentecostal organizations’ view of sanctification. “Keswick groups identify sanctification as a life-long process of progressive growth in grace that begins at conversion but is never fully completed...Christ [is] the foundation and the Holy Spirit [is] the agent of sanctification. The Spirit suppresses the power of the sinful nature, which nonetheless continues to exert its influence on the Christian life” (Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living The Full Gospel*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, New York, NY, 2017, pg. 71).

²²⁰ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pg. 95.

²²¹ “It seems likely that this refers to his inability to turn the desire into action. It also means that everything ‘good’ in human beings is tainted with evil” (John R.W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 211).

*nature—is beyond redemption. It cannot be touched even by the grace of God. It cannot be made new and above all it cannot be repaired.*²²²

As we will see later, we have instead received a new self that lives alongside the old self (in constant struggle [Galatians 5:17]) and our walk with Jesus entails learning to live from this new self—**you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self** (Colossians 3:9-10).

Now to the *sarx*'s power in believers. Here we tend to “under-estimate” ourselves. Romans 1:18-32 and 3:9-18 describe just a few of the things of which we are capable as humans—even as believers. We must admit the depths of our own depravity, of the degree to which our personality and actions/attitudes reflect *sarx*. Even in an age of massive low self-esteem and great psychological trauma carried by many from abusive childhoods, all believers must learn the language of wretchedness—**what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?** (Romans 7:24).

Three additional important truths about the sinful nature are crucial in Paul's thinking—

- It must manifest itself in evil; it cannot lie dormant—**So then, I myself²²³ in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin** (Romans 7:25B). Outside learning to die to the power of the sinful nature, all we can and will do is serve sin. The sinful nature seizes the natural appetites of the body and makes them inordinate. Unless we learn to walk in the Spirit by grace, sin will reign in our experience. We sin, even when we will not to.
 - *Human beings, because of their inherited depravity and their own sins, have become spiritually and personally schizophrenic—that is, all people contain within their person and express in their actions contradictory attitudes and qualities that, apart from divine intervention, keep them from doing the good things that they know to be right and are always being driven to do those evil things that they know to be wrong.*²²⁴

²²² Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 8. “The writer is *unspiritual*, ‘fleshly’ (*sarkinos*), still possessing and being oppressed by his twisted, self-centred nature (*sarx*), on account of which he can also describe himself as *sold as a slave to sin* (14)” (John R.W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 211). “Paul here gives the real problem that lies at the heart of humanity's tragic situation: the presence of the malevolent forces of ‘the sin’ that have permeated all of human history and ‘one's own sinful nature’ and that frustrate every person's best intentions” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 664).

²²³ **Or I of myself** (RSV); “I by means of my own resources and abilities, apart from God” (Longenecker).

²²⁴ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 672.

- It cannot do God’s will—the **sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so** (Romans 8:7). The sinful nature cannot be consecrated;²²⁵ it is totally captive to sin and is utterly rebellious; we cannot make or will ourselves to be better. Do not be shocked when negative realities well up in you, when you see how much your personality reflects sin. A part of us is unredeemable. **We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin** (Romans 3:9). **I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me** (Romans 7:21).
 - *I, Gary Matsdorf, my ego, am nothing but sarx. I am evil in my inclinations and attitudes. I am rebellious by nature and captive to a power stronger than I. I have a force within me that has and is molding my personality. Apart from grace, I cannot get free from it. I can try to act better, but it will not ultimately help. I am not better. Just cross my ego and I will show you there is a part of me that is unredeemable.*
- It loves to disguise itself behind “religion.” The Pharisees were masters at this. Their religious flesh and accompanying self-righteousness drove them to a state lambasted by Jesus (Matthew 23:1-11; 25-28). Religious flesh, because it is so bent on disguising itself and maintaining its front, becomes inflexible, self-righteous, petty, boastful, hypocritical and often, unchangeable. Ultimately, it insults God—you **who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you”** (Romans 2:23-24).

²²⁵ “By its very nature the mind of the flesh...the mind governed by the flesh...is hostile to God and therefore will not submit to his law” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 331). “The mind of the flesh...cherishes a deep-seated animosity against him. It is antagonistic to his name, kingdom and will, to his day, his people and his word, to his Son, his Spirit and his glory” (John R.W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 224).

ROMANS 6:1-14 (Part 2)—

By way of review, “Paul is here concerned to insist that justification has inescapable moral implications, that our righteous status before God involves an absolute obligation to seek righteousness of life, that to imagine that we can ‘receive righteousness in Christ without at the same time laying hold on sanctification’ is a profane absurdity.”²²⁶ The entire section has to do with subduing the power of sin, of living out the promise of vs. 14—**sin shall no longer be your master,²²⁷ because you are not under the law, but under grace.²²⁸**

Unpacking the implications of Romans 6:14 necessitates understanding three major truths—what is **sin**? What does it mean that **you are not under the law**? And what does it mean that **you are under grace**? We have discussed **sin**, establishing that every human being is born with a *sarx* that shapes and molds them. Conversion does not do away with the presence of the *sarx* nor does conversion “clean it up”; it is in fact unredeemable, but it does not have to have dominion...be one’s master...if we come out from under the law and live under grace. This session will deal with understanding what it means to be **under the law**.

To be under the law²²⁹ is a very complex matter in Pauline thought, but one which must be understood if we are going to live a life of freedom in the Spirit for “to be under law...means to be under the dominion of sin.”²³⁰

- *Although the expression “to be under the law” is used with nuances, it [fundamentally] denotes...that [humankind] lives, groans, has been put in chains as a prisoner, a slave...under the hostile, enslaving power of the law; a*

²²⁶ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 295.

²²⁷ Or **sin will have no dominion over you** (NRSV).

²²⁸ This is the key theological truth of Romans 1-8.

²²⁹ The NRSV—**you are not under law**—is preferred for the absence of the definite article (**the**) makes the application and implications broader than the Mosaic Law that is often implied when the definite article is used. Nevertheless, many of the principles discussed below apply to both law/the Law. “To be ‘under law’ means to live under the regime of ‘law’...something written on tables of stone...and to be ‘under grace’ is to live...where the law is written on the human heart” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 269).

²³⁰ Bruce, *Colossians*, pg. 193.

*bondage from which only the regime of divine grace can deliver him (Rom. 7:14; 8:2; Gal. 4:5).*²³¹

To understand Paul's point of being under law, we must begin with a definition of law in Paul (Greek, *nomos*). His understanding is broader than Torah. Law in this respect can best be defined as *any external code that defines human conduct*. By this definition, we soon realize we encounter different laws daily. There are city, county, state and federal laws. There are laws in the home, in the work place and in the Church. Such laws do not even need to be written, all of us having met both people's "written" and "unwritten laws" at some point. The subtlest of laws are those that we put on ourselves.

The very nature of law, therefore, makes it at once an authority, a standard of judgment—**all who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law** (Romans 2:12).²³² Furthermore, because one does not address human conduct without expecting a response, law at once puts upon us an *internal claim*. We must respond—either negatively or positively; we simply cannot ignore any law. To be under law, therefore, includes not only the definition of conduct, but also the corresponding authoritative claim on us.

Finally, when we talk about being under law, we must also include the *consequences* if we do not respond appropriately, if we violate a law. In the theological realm, Paul terms this *condemnation*. Being under law then includes being—**1)** under a defined code; **2)** under the internal claim of response; and **3)** under consequences if broken.

Is there anything inherently wrong with any of this? Is there anything wrong with God defining what is right and wrong, wanting a proper response and meting out consequences if broken? No. God has a claim upon us and as such has a right to define our conduct—**"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession"** (Exodus 19:4-5). Paul goes so far as to say—

- **the law is holy**—it is pure, wholesome and unpolluted (Romans 7:12);

²³¹ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pg. 148.

²³² Although Paul's reference to **the law** here is Torah, the greater principle addressed still applies.

- **the commandment is righteous**—it is entirely fair and equitable (Romans 7:12);
- **the commandment is good**—it is a positive thing to have God define standards (Romans 7:12);
- **the law is spiritual**—it comes from God and is untainted by the Fall of Adam (Romans 7:14).²³³

We must never imagine, therefore, there is anything wrong *per se* with God defining human conduct.²³⁴

Why then the problem? Why does God want us out from under the law? Paul establishes three primary reasons—

- **We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin** (Romans 7:14).
- **The law [is] weakened by the sinful nature...** (Romans 8:3).
- **Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death** (Romans 7:8-11).

Let us now look in detail at each of these dynamics—

1. **We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin** (Romans 7:14). The problem is not the law; the problem is the *sarx* as it comes into contact with the law—our inability to keep the law, as our unredeemable ego meets up with the commandment. When our *sarx* meets the commandments, it says, “No way!” It rebels and keeps us in dominion to sin. “The condition of the human heart is such that no law could help it.”²³⁵

²³³ “To speak of the law as ‘spiritual’, as Robert Jewett has pointed out, is ‘unparalleled’ and a bit ‘innovative’ in early Jewish and early Christian literature...it speaks of the law’s divine origin...authority...and as being never able to be properly understood or put into practice except by the enablement of the same Spirit by whom it was given” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 661).

²³⁴ This is not always true with reference to human defined standards and codes.

²³⁵ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 550.

Our personalities and appetites are slaves to sin and external codes do not free us.

- 2. The law [is] weakened by the sinful nature...** (Romans 8:3). In defining a second reason why we must come out from under the law, Paul notes a limitation of the law. It cannot overpower the *sarx*; it has no inherent energizing ability to curb the *sarx*—**if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law** (Galatians 3:21); **“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”...indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence**²³⁶ (Colossians 2:21, 23). “The law is incapable of breaking the power of sin and conquering ‘the flesh,’ so that sin might no longer reign in the ‘mortal body’ (Rom. 6:12).”²³⁷ Paul reinforces this idea in Romans 7:6 by referring to the law as **old** and **written**. By **old**, he means it is insufficient to produce in us the righteousness Jesus demands—**by calling this covenant “new,” He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear** (Hebrews 8:13). By **written**, Paul means it is rule based and not relationship based and one cannot legislate behavior. “The reason why the Law cannot make sinful people righteous is that it is an external code, whereas their sinful hearts need a transforming inward power.”²³⁸ Rules never produce life. Try loving God or another person because of rules and demands rather than out of heart-felt relationship. It creates tension, discord, disappointment and guilt—**for the written code**

²³⁶ Or **are of no value, serving only to indulge the flesh** (RSV footnote). “Energetic religious endeavors could not hold the *sarx* in check. Quite the reverse. These man-made regulations actually pandered to the flesh” (Peter O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary—Colossians, Philemon*, Word Books, Publisher, Waco TX, 1982, pg. 155).

²³⁷ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pg. 143. “It was necessary for the problem of the flesh, that is, sinful human nature, to be dealt with before the requirements of the law could be fulfilled” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 325).

²³⁸ Ladd, *loc. cit.*

kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6 [RSV]).²³⁹ Don Pickerill refers to this dynamic as “the DTs of the law.”²⁴⁰

- *Have you ever heard about the “DTs”? When a person is given over to the power of alcohol or the like he gets what we call the “DTs.” The “DTs” of the law are its “demands” and its “threat.” The law is demanding much as a married woman is demanded by the law to be faithful to her husband (Romans 7:1-6). There is a claim, and whereas the claim on a wife may be delightful (Romans 7 is only an analogy), the claim of the law is death-like. Furthermore, the law threatens even as it threatens the wife who will be called an adulteress if she marries another before her husband’s death...[“the DTs”] also put a demand in our spirit...things must be right or else. Or else what? Or else you deserve my anger!²⁴¹ We get upset if it is not right and we drive people out of the church, children out of their homes, and love out of the community of believers.²⁴²*

3. Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting...for sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death (Romans 7: 8, 11).²⁴³ Paul’s final reason for our need to be free from the law is an outgrowth of his first concern. External codes arouse the *sarx* and make it all the more rebellious—**the power of sin is the law** (1 Corinthians 15:56). “The relationship of law to sin is that the former is what gives the latter its power.”²⁴⁴ It seems like external codes and laws are valuable in controlling behavior, but they only give the *sarx* opportunity all the more to arise, deceive and put us in a death-like state if there is not the enablement by grace of the Holy Spirit. Let someone say to you, “You

²³⁹ “The doctrine through which we receive the commandment to lead an abstinent, virtuous life, is the letter (written code). This kills unless there is with it the Spirit, which makes alive” (St. Augustine, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 646).

²⁴⁰ According to *Wikipedia*, the DTs stands for *Delirium tremens* (Latin for "shaking frenzy"), an acute episode of being delirious (most often from alcohol withdrawal). It often creates a full blown effect that is physically evident through shivering, palpitations, sweating and in some cases, convulsions and death if not treated.

²⁴¹ Other manifestations of “or else” include pouting, withdrawing and “getting even.”

²⁴² Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

²⁴³ See below for an understanding of how this truth is also one reason why the law was given.

²⁴⁴ Fee, Gordon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1987, pg. 806. “As Lightfoot insisted, ‘definite prohibition is necessary in order to produce definite transgression, in whatever form this definite prohibition may be given’” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 642).

cannot” and guaranteed your *sarx* will say, “I will.” We may even get more than we bargained for—**did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful** (Romans 7:13, emphasis mine). Have you found this out yet? If not, try on your own strength to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself and let us know how far you get.

- *The remarkable thing about the evidence of the insufficiency of the law furnished [in Romans 7] consists in that Paul now represents the law as a power that provokes and, as it were, calls forth sin. The law does not restrain sin, but causes it to awaken; it does not reduce sin, but rather makes it to increase (cf. Rom. 5:20)...the sinful passions properly assert themselves only when they encounter the resistances of the law.*²⁴⁵

This entire system (represented in the concerns about the law noted above) then is what we are to be free from—the system of looking to external codes and all that entails for freedom from sin’s dominion. Paul does not mean we are free from the precepts of God’s timeless commandments; he means we are free from attaining them by external demand (Romans 8:3-4).²⁴⁶

- *By fulfilling the promise given to Abraham, Christ has ended the age of the Law and inaugurated the age of Christ, which means freedom from bondage and the end of the Law for the believer. However, it is clear that inasmuch as Paul always regards the Law as holy and just and good, he never thinks of the Law as being abolished. It remains the expression of the will of God.*²⁴⁷

This brings us to our last concern with reference to the law—Why the law? The answer is two-fold—to clearly define sin and to show the indispensability of the way of faith.

With reference to defining sin, we must remember that by way of original intent the law “provided Israel with a standard for obedience by which the covenant relationship must

²⁴⁵ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pg. 144.

²⁴⁶ “The Law is no longer merely an external written code but an inward, life-giving power that produces righteousness” (George Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 546). See also pg. 554 for an understanding of the distinction between the ethical (timeless) and ceremonial (fulfilled in Jesus) aspects of the Law.

²⁴⁷ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 553.

be preserved.”²⁴⁸ It did not *create* the covenant relationship (Romans 4:13-15). The role of the law in defining sin is spelled out in Romans 7:7—**I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”** Righteousness and holiness and how to worship God are not left to personal interpretation; He loves us too much to leave us in a moral fog. The law, then, is to be respected in that it clearly defines what God expects.

Secondly, the law serves to show the indispensability of the way of faith. In this regard, it was given to be broken!! **The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase...once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death** (Romans 5:20; 7:9-10). The giving of the law then is in sync with a greater biblical principle—in order to experience life, we must first experience death; we must come to an end of ourselves, seeing our dire need and the hopelessness, emptiness and death-like existence²⁴⁹ that accompany trying to please God by our own efforts.

- *It is precisely in the negative operation of the law that its purpose lies: to bar to man the way to salvation and thus—and here the reverse side of Paul’s gospel shows itself in this preaching of the law—to vindicate in a negative fashion the indispensability of the way of faith...the law does not open the way of salvation to man in his sin and self-conceit, but rather bars it; does not restrain sin, but increases it; does not liberate and quicken the sinner, but puts him to death and casts him into prison. For Paul no picture is too somber and too radical to throw light on this negative effect of the law and the divine purpose behind it in all its ruinous strength.*²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 540.

²⁴⁹ A person under law is really in a death-like state for legalism breeds only death. Whenever we see misery and death-likeness in the life of a believer or in a congregation (*cf.* Galatians 5:13), we should suspect legalism. It is a major reason why believers are unhappy by the boatload.

²⁵⁰ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 151.

ARE YOU LIVING UNDER LAW?

Pages 21-23 of *The Reign of Grace* by Don Pickerill list five penetrating questions to help us understand if we are living under law. Four additional questions are also applicable—

- If you despair at ever experiencing all that God says can be experienced or feel that you will always be emotionally/psychologically weak where you are weak now, you are under law. You are evaluating either from the standpoint of what *you must do* to make things different, or you are relegating God's power as less than the weakness you face.
- If you overly stress life as a duty, placing duty/performance in life above relationship, you are living under law. Law manifests itself in a performance attitude, whereby you value yourself or others more for what you/they can do than for who you/they are. God's primary concern is that we be in right relationship with Him and others. Then, as a result of that relationship with Him, we do right things. We do not secure our relationship with Him through what we do; nor should we secure relationships with others based on what they do.
- If for you things *must be right*, you are under law. This does not mean that we do not want things done well, nor that we are not to strive for excellence. But there is a difference between wanting to do right and *demanding* things be right. The Pharisees demanded the right—to their undoing.
- If you have spiritual pride, “looking down your nose” at others and smugly deeming them less mature or less holy than you, you are under law. You judge yourself to be successful at measuring up to God's standards and have thus become boastful, proud and arrogant.

It takes a long time to come out from under aspects of the law. We naturally tend toward it; we gravitate to self-effort and an “I have to please” mentality. Finally, because aspects of legalism are very subtle, it is often difficult to see its influence in our lives. This is where we need grace—our only hope of freedom from sin's dominion.

ROMANS 6:1-14 (Part 3)—

We have been concentrating on Romans 6:14—**sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.** We have deliberated the implications of sin (*sarx*) and what it means to be **under law** and why the need to come out from under it. Before examining our responsibility in the process of sin not dominating, we want to understand what it means to be **under grace.**

Grace is a familiar word in the Church—but one that is often under-appreciated. God’s heart is that grace reign—**where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord** (Romans 5:20-21). “Nothing could sum up better the blessings of being in Christ than the expression ‘the reign of grace’. For grace forgives sins through the cross, and bestows on the sinner both righteousness and eternal life. Grace satisfies the thirsty soul and fills the hungry with good things.”²⁵¹

The Greek word for grace (*charis*) occurs more than 150 times in the New Testament. *Charis*—

- Comes to us in abundance and leads to living life as God intended—**how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace...reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!** (Romans 5:17).
- Transforms us and enables us to become all God wants us to become—**I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect** (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).
- Saves us—**it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God** (Ephesians 2:8).

²⁵¹ Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 157-158.

- Is the essence of Jesus’ personhood—**from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace** (John 1:16 [NRSV]).²⁵²
- **Teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age** (Titus 2:12).²⁵³

The most common “pew” definition of grace is “unmerited favor” or “undeserved blessing freely bestowed on many by God—a concept which is at the heart not only of Christian theology but also of all genuinely Christian experience.”²⁵⁴ These are not bad definitions, for they say reams about the essence of *charis*.

- It is “unmerited” or “undeserved” in that it is a **gift** (Romans 5:15). We can **but receive God’s abundant provision of grace** (Romans 5:17, emphasis mine) by faith (Ephesians 2:8). As Paul reminded Israel—**so too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace** (Romans 11:5-6).
- Grace is also “favor based.” When Gabriel greeted Mary, he said, **“Greetings, you who are highly favored!”** (Luke 1:28). **“You who are highly favored!”** (Greek, *chaire*) derives from the same root as *charis*. “Mary has been especially favoured by God...[with] no suggestion of any particular worthiness on the part of Mary herself.”²⁵⁵ To be under grace is to realize we are God’s favorites; we are His friends, under His favor and not His judgment. He both loves and likes us, so much so that He is willing to say—**“I will be their God, and they will be My people”** (Hebrews 8:10).²⁵⁶ Furthermore,

²⁵² **Grace upon grace (grace in place of grace already given [TNIV])** “is an unusual expression...clearly John intends to put some emphasis on the thought of grace. Probably he means that as one piece of divine grace (so to speak) recedes it is replaced by another. God’s grace to his people is continuous and is never exhausted” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To John – Revised Edition*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, pg. 98).

²⁵³ This aspect of grace will be discussed later as we look at Freedom from Sin and Romans 8.

²⁵⁴ Hughes, P.E., *Grace in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell (General Editor), Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1999 printing, pg. 479.

²⁵⁵ Marshall, I. Howard, *Commentary on Luke*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992 reprint, pg. 65.

²⁵⁶ It is amazing how many believers struggle with really believing that they are God’s favorites, especially when they do something wrong. They cannot sort out godly conviction from self/demonic condemnation. To be under grace means God has no condemning charge against us and that we must not confuse

favor cannot be separated biblically from goodness. To be under grace is to realize that God has designed only goodness for those whom He loves—**“I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them...I will rejoice in doing them good...with all My heart and soul”** (Jeremiah 32:40-41). “Israel’s loyalty to God is made possible by God’s loyalty to them. This is the first and most important ‘good’ that Yahweh can do for [us].”²⁵⁷ God is pursuing us with goodness with all His being.²⁵⁸ Even negative realities in life are part of His goodness, as He uses them to mature us—**we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...[and they are] predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son** (Romans 8:28-29).²⁵⁹

Though “unmerited favor” does define *charis* to a great degree, it is too impersonal a definition. As stated above, John ties grace into Jesus—**from Jesus’ fullness have we all received,²⁶⁰ grace upon grace** (John 1:16 [NRSV]). Grace is inseparably linked to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is not just some mystical concept, nor even a loving disposition coming from God. *Grace is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ inexhaustibly meeting us at our point of need. Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with*

discipline with a condemning charge. Our conduct (though it may be very carnal [1 Corinthians 3:1-4]) does not change His commitment to us. (This does not negate the possibility of apostasy [Colossians 1:21-23; James 5:19-20], but the Bible’s basic call is one of humble security in Jesus, not always anxious insecurity.)

²⁵⁷ Keown, Gerald, et al, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Books, Publisher, Dallas, TX, 1995, pg. 161.

²⁵⁸ The temptation that deceived Eve was allowing the enemy to convince her that God was withholding some good thing from her (Genesis 3:4-5). Many Christians today believe God is “out to settle some score with them.” James says the end result of this thinking is that **they are double-minded and unstable in all they do** (James 1:8).

²⁵⁹ See also Genesis 50:20 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-17.

²⁶⁰ “Christ alone is the source of all our blessings. There is a hint at the infinite extent of his resources, for ‘all’ receive from him” (Leon Morris, *John*, pg. 97).

confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).²⁶¹

SUMMATION—

Jesus Christ inexhaustibly meeting us at our point of need is our only hope of experiencing freedom from sin's dominion (Romans 6:14) and the newness of life God promises (Romans 6:4). To be under grace, therefore, means—

- We live drawing our life from the Person of Jesus Christ, remembering that God has only grace for us.
- We realize we cannot produce any righteousness in ourselves—either for justification or sanctification.²⁶² We could never merit God's favor, no matter how hard we might try. We are, in and of our historical self, powerless to do good. The only way we can do or become good is if God gives us a new heart by grace.
- We live in the freedom of knowing we are God's favorites—even when life is difficult or He has to discipline us (Hebrews 12:3-11). This means we cannot think of a one-on-one correlation between our conduct and His commitment to us. In other words, we cannot think that grace comes to us according to our conduct—if we are “bad,” then God and His grace get cut off for a while; if we are “good,” God and His grace come rushing back. Grace is always free; it never comes by way of a paycheck.
- We relate to other people and treat them *exactly* like God relates to us and treats us (see Galatians 5:22-23).

²⁶¹ “The challenge to *approach God's throne of grace* is an admonition to persistent, confident prayer that is based particularly on Jesus' own experience of sufferings and trials, and his consequent ability to *empathize with our weaknesses* (v. 15)” (Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews---The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, pp. 184-185).

²⁶² It is amazing how many believers realize only grace saves them, but that it is a combination of grace **and** works that matures them and/or “keeps them saved.”

ROMANS 6:1-14 (Part 4)—

Having studied the key components of vs. 14—**sin shall no longer be your master,**²⁶³ **because you are not under the law,**²⁶⁴ **but under grace**—we now need to examine more closely how Paul says such freedom becomes actualized in our daily lives. By way of review, we need to remember “Paul is here concerned to insist that justification has inescapable moral implications, that our righteous status before God involves an absolute obligation to seek righteousness of life, that to imagine that we can ‘receive righteousness in Christ without at the same time laying hold on sanctification’ is a profane absurdity.”²⁶⁵

The exposition arises in “reply to the preposterous argument”²⁶⁶ **shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?** (vs. 1; *cf.* Romans 3:8). Paul himself postulates this question being asked—**what shall we say then?** (vs. 1)—based on what he knows could be a false inference of Romans 5:20—**where sin increased, grace increased all the more.** In effect, it is saying that sin is good for the gospel, so why not continue with sin as a life-style so as to give grace an opportunity to shine?! “I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged.”²⁶⁷

The basis of Paul’s response that strongly rejects this inference—**by no means!** (vs. 2)—is that there has been a positional change, a realm transfer if you would—**we are those who have died to sin** (vs. 2). “He is referring to the death to sin that marks the beginning of the characteristic Christian life,”²⁶⁸ a positional separation from the ruling power of sin that must then become actualized by each individual—**do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires** (vs. 12).²⁶⁹ This realm transfer

²⁶³ Or **sin will have no dominion over you** (NRSV).

²⁶⁴ Or **not under law** (RSV).

²⁶⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 295.

²⁶⁶ Bruce, *Romans*, pg. 128.

²⁶⁷ W. H. Auden quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 356.

²⁶⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 247. Note also Moo, “Death to sin is part and parcel of becoming a Christian” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 359).

²⁶⁹ Comparing Romans 6:12 with Romans 6:14 shows that the imperative springs from the established indicative. The imperative does not establish the indicative.

makes drawing one's life from the old realm totally out of sync with who we now are—**how can we live in it any longer?** (vs. 2).²⁷⁰ “How can you who identified with Christ live as though Christ never died, as though sin...[was] still [a] dominating factor for present life?”²⁷¹

Before we study Paul's “pathway to actualized freedom,” we need to examine three instinctively wrong approaches to dealing with sin's mastery...approaches that more often than not characterize the lives of believers. We do so remembering again that sin is not just a few moral missteps; it is a powerful force (the ethical flesh/*sarx*), a self-centeredness that manifests itself in seeing no need for God and in some way using people, at any cost.²⁷² It has no respect for God or His ways (Romans 8:7). “One can define sin as man's willing-to-have-command-of-himself, wanting to-be-as-God.”²⁷³ Because of its deceptive nature, it does not even respect the person it is tempting (often so disguising itself the one being tempted is fooled).

- *The principle of sin is not fundamentally some impulse, biological or psychological...but rather is a spiritual dynamic...that is immanently present within human nature. The operation and function of this spiritual dynamic are to enslave and condition the biological and psychological drives of human life in the service of sin.*²⁷⁴

The first instinctive approach often taken to dealing with sin is that of **self-reformation**. The very title betrays its basic premise and energy source. This approach begins with the premise that since we are Christians, we should “act better.” We examine ourselves, our motives, words, actions, attitudes and reactions, only to discover how far below God's standards we are falling. So, we set out on a program of **self-reformation**—endeavoring to improve **self**. When we have a sinful attitude, we repress it, thinking that in the repressing we are diminishing its power. We alter behavior, hold our tongue and clench our fists—but inside we are still “seething.”

But **self-reformation** does not work, regardless of how much effort and energy we spend. Note three basic reasons it does not work—

²⁷⁰ Or **how can we draw our life from the realm of sin anymore?**

²⁷¹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 327.

²⁷² See Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42 for six major realities identified with sin.

²⁷³ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.

²⁷⁴ Laymen in *The Believer's Guide To Spiritual Warfare*, White, Thomas, Servant Publications, Ann Harbor, MI, 1990, pg. 27.

1. The first reason self-reformation does not work can be understood by imagining sin as a very prolific fruit tree that is rooted in our life and bears fruit constantly. The self-reformation approach amounts to cutting off the fruit that appears on the branches, but never dealing with the root. If we relax at all from our “pruning,” we soon have a tree full of fruit!
2. The second reason self-reformation does not work is that it misunderstands the problem. The problem is not the fruit; the problem is the *root*. Our real problem is not the sinful words or deeds, nor even the evil desires, thoughts and attitudes that come to the surface of our souls. Sin is not fundamentally wrong-doing; it is **wrong-being**. Our real problem is the unredeemable sinful nature (*sarx*) empowering the fruit—a core which self-reformation is never able to affect.
3. The third reason self-reformation is futile can best be understood through an analogy. Picture a house with a dirt floor. Imagine what would happen if we decided that we were going to clean that floor. We could sweep and sweep and never really get the job done. And heaven forbid if we should ever try to scrub it! Yet, we scrub and scrub our behavior, desperately hoping it will touch the inner core—all the while just making a bigger and bigger mess of things. “I liken this approach to that of scrubbing a dirt floor—the matter just gets muddier with effort.”²⁷⁵ The answer to the dirt floor is a new “non-dirt” floor; likewise, the answer to our struggle with sin is a new self that becomes the dominating power within in—not self-reformation.

The second instinctive approach is that of **fighting sin**. Somewhat related to self-reformation, the approach of fighting sin is different in that it never expects to “clean up” the *sarx*, just defeat it. With self-reformation, we imagine that we can improve the essence of who we are; with **fighting sin**, we meet our unredeemable sinful nature head on and endeavor to conquer it through will power. Many religious weapons are employed in our battle—fasting, scripture memory, praying in tongues, attending church

²⁷⁵ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 44.

every time the doors are open, even radical asceticism.²⁷⁶ But because of the nature of that which we are trying to fight, fighting sin does not work. There is **indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking²⁷⁷ the indulgence of the flesh²⁷⁸** (Colossians 2:23 [RSV]). “It is the ‘Avis’ approach—‘I am going to try harder. I know I failed that time, but I am going to try again’.”²⁷⁹

We all know the Avis approach. We discern sin creeping up; we can feel the temptation or the arousal of the sinful nature. We start fighting—“I won’t do it; I won’t do it; I won’t do it...I’m sorry I did it; I’m sorry I did it...” We must come to realize that in and of ourselves we can no more master sin than we can master death. You may jog, eat right, never smoke or chew...but you will still die. The same is true with sin; you will never be able to successfully fight it.

The third instinctive approach is that of **coping**. This most often follows on the heels of the first two approaches. Having tried self-reformation and fighting sin, only to meet with repeated failure, the next logical approach is to resign ourselves to our weaknesses and settle down to live the rest of our lives as we are now. Rather than expecting to experience any real freedom from sin’s dominion, we learn to “cope and hang on by our fingernails” until we go to be with Jesus. In coping, we also put pressure on those around us to live with/accept our sin. The major responsibility ultimately becomes theirs, not ours.

Apart from our inability to win the battle with sin, two additional tragedies emerge if we try to deal with sin from one of these three perspectives—

²⁷⁶ Do not confuse biblical discipline with fighting sin. **Discipline yourselves** (1 Peter 1:13 [NRSV]; **be self-controlled** [NIV]) is not a call to fight sin; rather, it means “pay full attention”—that is, attentively watch your life and when you see sin tempting or manifesting itself, deal with it according to the principles taught in Romans 6. Neither should we confuse practical advice and wisdom such as Paul’s **flee the evil desires of youth** (2 Timothy 2:22) with fighting sin. Similar to **do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness** (Romans 6:13), it is a reminder that Christ’s provision for dying to sin is not automatically and robotically released to us. We must appropriate it by faith. **Flee/do not offer** presuppose the presence of God’s grace enabling us.

²⁷⁷ Or **stopping** (ESV); **restraining** (TNIV).

²⁷⁸ “The bent within fallen humans toward self and the world, the ‘sinful nature’ or ‘sinful impulse’...the false teachers were...elevating their rules and practices and giving spiritual beings so much credit that they were, in effect, losing contact with Christ, the only source of spiritual power and growth (v. 19)” (Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon—The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008, pg. 242).

²⁷⁹ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 45.

- Some begin to imagine themselves as being experts at self-reformation, fighting or coping and soon develop great spiritual pride. We imagine ourselves “expert at pruning our sinful nature,” and expect others to be just as “expert.” We think our lives are pretty well cleaned up and that we have our problems under control. Those who do not know us well may be impressed; those who do know us well rarely are. We are prime candidates to become Pharisees.
- Others (the vast majority) find themselves in frustration and despair—neither of which they dare allow to show “at church.” They live behind masks and slowly drift out of fellowship. The constant effort of dealing with sin from one of the false approaches has become too overwhelming; it is easier to just give up on God and get the monkey off our back.²⁸⁰
 - *We feel confusion and guilt and pain. This can even make us a hypocrite, by the way, for we do not dare tell anybody what our inside systems are really like. So we go around feigning and play acting the entire Christian life. That is not life! It is nothing but a mass of misery and this is the reason many Christians are unhappy.*²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Those who do not give up on God and/or the Church generally live at some level of constant depression.

²⁸¹ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 17.

ROMANS 6:1-14 (Part 5)—

Having established several facts that Paul assumes we do and indeed must know with reference to our relationship in Christ to sin (vv. 1-10), Paul next lists important responsibilities we have in the process of actualized freedom from sin's mastery. His list contains a series of imperatives.²⁸²

- **We must know.** Paul's **don't you know?** (vs. 3)²⁸³ intimates that he expects believers to be informed and to grasp certain truths, for actualized freedom from sin's mastery is directly linked to the biblical data we know to appropriate.²⁸⁴ For example, we must know **that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus²⁸⁵ were baptized into His death** (vs. 3).²⁸⁶ We also are to know that **our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin²⁸⁷ might be done away with** (vs. 6).²⁸⁸ "The 'old man' is no longer supreme. This does not mean that the believer lives untroubled by the possibility of sinning. There is a sense in which a death has taken place once and for all in the believer, but there is another in which he dies every day."²⁸⁹ Finally, we are to know that though **we died with Christ** (vs. 8), we go on to live with Christ—**we believe that we will also live with Him** (vs. 8). "The

²⁸² These imperatives are Paul's first in the epistle, having taken over five chapters to build understanding to which we respond.

²⁸³ **Or are you ignorant of these facts?**

²⁸⁴ The two Greek words translated **know** in Romans 6:6, 9 (*ginosko*; *oida*) refer not to experiential knowledge, but to accurately and precisely realizing facts relevant to freedom from sin's mastery. See Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 308.

²⁸⁵ **Baptized into Christ Jesus** references "the Roman Christians' water baptism as their outward initiation into Christian existence...by the date of Romans, 'baptize' had become almost a technical expression for the rite of Christian initiation by water, and this is surely the meaning the Roman Christians would have given the word" (Douglas Moo, *Romans*, pg. 359).

²⁸⁶ **Baptized into His death** affirms "strongly that the justified are those united by faith to all that Christ means, and therefore antinomianism is impossible for them...God made him sin for us, and his death dealt decisively with sin, took it out of the way, paid its penalty, removed its sting, won the victory over it" (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 247, 255).

²⁸⁷ Note that the human body and its appetites are not sinful in and of themselves but are often "taken over" by the *sarx* in ways that are sinful.

²⁸⁸ **Or be rendered powerless** (TNIV footnote). Other truths we are to know include understanding the sinful nature (ethical flesh), being under law, being under grace, faith and our position/provision in Christ.

²⁸⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 251.

novelty in Christianity was the emphasis which it laid rather on the living than on the dying...the dying is always made to appear to be in order to a living. The end is always the life.”²⁹⁰ Obviously, knowledge is not an end in itself and there is a worldly knowledge that seeks to boast, but this is not Paul’s reference here. **We have not stopped praying for you...so that you may lead a life worthy of the Lord...growing in the knowledge of God** (Colossians 1:9-10).²⁹¹

- **In the same way, count²⁹² yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in²⁹³ Christ Jesus** (vs. 11). **In the same way** calls our attention back to vv. 8-10 and reminds us, “Don’t be what you are not.” In other words, start activating what you know to be true in terms of death to sin rather than being passive or worse yet continuing not to confront sin in reality. “Faith means seeing things as Christ sees them and then acting on the vision...Christ’s death and resurrection has altered their position, and they should live in accordance with the new reality.”²⁹⁴ A major key to understanding Paul here lies in grasping his use of the verb **count**.²⁹⁵ **Count** translates the Greek verb *logizomai* that “denotes not a pretending (‘as if’), nor a mere ideal, but a deliberate and sober judgment on the basis of the gospel.”²⁹⁶ It comes from a root meaning “to put together, collect, harvest; [it] suggests a regulated perception and an acceptance of given facts.”²⁹⁷ It was used in mathematical settings meaning to calculate, evaluate or deliberate facts; to take a list of figures, add them up and derive a conclusion. *Logizomai* evolved to develop the nuance of taking known facts and pondering them, reflecting on them or meditating on them

²⁹⁰ Gore quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 254.

²⁹¹ **Or as you grow in the knowledge of God** (NRSV).

²⁹² **Consider** (NRSV); **reckon** (NKJV). It could also be translated **recognize**.

²⁹³ **Or by reason of our union with** (Stott).

²⁹⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

²⁹⁵ The Greek verbal tense is present, indicating that this process of counting is a continuous life-long process. “Despite the assertions of vv. 2-11, sin’s rule is not merely a possibility, but a reality to be resisted all the time” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 336).

²⁹⁶ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 315. “this ‘reckoning’ is not make-believe...we are to consider what in fact we are, namely *dead to sin and alive to God* (11), like Christ (10). Once we grasp this, that our old life has ended, with the score settled, the debt paid and the law satisfied, we shall want to have nothing more to do with it” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 179).

²⁹⁷ Eichler, *Logizomai* in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology – Volume 3*, Colin Brown, General Editor, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979 printing, pg. 822.

over and over in one’s mind, much like a cow chews its cud. Finally, *logizomai* has the idea of being convinced by what has been recognized. This is that “Eureka!” phase, whereby we are absolutely convinced spiritually, emotionally and psychologically that all the truths relative to freedom from sin’s mastery are true—for me—and that they work. “The sin of the unbeliever is the natural consequence of the fact that he is a slave to sin, whereas the sin of the believer is quite out of character.”²⁹⁸ “By virtue of God’s gracious decision Christ’s death and risen life are counted as [ours], so that, in God’s sight, [we] are ‘in Christ’ dead to sin but alive to God.”²⁹⁹

- **Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body³⁰⁰ so that you obey its evil desires** (vs. 12).³⁰¹ Paul is quite careful to introduce this prohibition with **therefore**. He is saying that because all the facts of Romans 6:1-11 are true³⁰² and we know them to be true deep inside, we can make a choice to confront sin’s mastery every time it wants to dominate by calling upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to enable us by grace to die to its dominion. “In union with Christ we *have been made* dead to sin and alive to God; it remains for us to appropriate (v. 11) and apply (vv. 12-13) what God has done for us...[so] we must stop serving [sin] as if it were our rightful sovereign”³⁰³
- **But rather³⁰⁴ offer³⁰⁵ yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life** (vs. 13).³⁰⁶ Paul here presents not only the “positive” step

²⁹⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 259.

²⁹⁹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 316.

³⁰⁰ **Your mortal body** denotes your entire being, especially in terms of your interaction with the world. “The battle is a spiritual one, but it is fought, and won or lost, in the daily decisions the believer makes about how to use his body” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 383).

³⁰¹ **Evil desires** references all that is contrary to God’s will, including desires in our mind and will and what we often erroneously perceive to be our “needs.” Note the further related prohibition—**do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness** (Romans 6:13). (The construction of the Greek that is translated **do not offer** infers the cessation of activity.)

³⁰² Note also the reiterated promise in Romans 6:14.

³⁰³ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 380, 384. “Believers in Jesus are still members of ‘this age,’ and so they are still able to be tempted by sin and can even be dominated by sin. Therefore, the apostle’s exhortations to all believers in Jesus are these: ‘Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires!’ and ‘Do not allow sin to be your master!’—and he further insists that Christians must never try to justify their sinful actions on some such perverted pretexts as ‘We should continue in sin so that grace might increase’ or ‘We are not under the law but under grace’” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 617).

³⁰⁴ Greek *alla*, indicating a strong contrast.

³⁰⁵ Or **present** (NRSV; ESV); **yield** (RSV).

we are to take, but infers a “proactive” step. In other words, we need to consistently ask God for spiritual fortitude against sin, especially against specific “besetting sins.” **Offer**³⁰⁷ (Greek, *paristemi*) has the idea of bringing yourself before someone who can help, of putting yourself at someone else’s disposal. In this case, it is regularly and specifically putting yourself at Jesus’ disposal.³⁰⁸ We know what it is like to put ourselves at sin’s disposal; Paul wants us to learn to do the same with reference to putting ourselves at Jesus’ disposal, so He can activate our freedom from sin’s mastery by enabling us to actually die to any given sin.³⁰⁹

ROMANS 6:15-23—

In language and style very similar to Romans 6:1, Paul addresses a second possible objection to the matter of grace as it relates to the sin issue—**what then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?** (vs. 15). The question is born out of a possible misunderstanding that **because you are not under the law, but under grace** (Romans 6:14), you are basically “law-less” and thus prone to fostering sin. Paul’s answer is again a resounding **by no means!** (vs. 15). Why this time? Because of who Christians now are as compared to who we were—**you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness** (vs. 18). “Freedom from the Law does not mean freedom from God but freedom for God.”³¹⁰

- *In 6:1-14, Paul responds to an objection that the very abundance of God’s grace in Christ encourages sin by arguing that Christ, in fact, sets believers free from sin. In 6:15-23, Paul responds to a similar objection by emphasizing the “flip side” of this freedom from sin: slavery to God and to*

³⁰⁶ Paul further elaborates this as well—**offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness** (Romans 6:13). (**Righteousness** here is not used in the forensic sense in which Paul has used it previously but as meaning behavior that pleases God.)

³⁰⁷ The Greek verbal tense (aorist) likely denotes decisiveness, “a wholehearted and total commitment” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 258).

³⁰⁸ See Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53 for additional insight into the process of offering yourself to God, as seen in the Old Testament ordination of the priests.

³⁰⁹ It is crucial that we remember that offering does not involve our old self. The old self cannot yield to God. Only our new self can be yielded to God. It is also this new self that must be strengthened by the Spirit, so that it is strong enough to prompt us to yield (see Romans 12:1-2).

³¹⁰ Brunner quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 261.

*righteousness...Christians are “under obligation” to obey their new “master” God.*³¹¹

- *Vs. 14 paves the way for Paul to respond to another charge brought against his gospel: because he teaches that believers are not under the law, he is again encouraging moral anarchy. It also paves the way for the apostle to explain to his audience the true nature of Christian freedom and the choice that faces them—either to be slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. As far as Paul is concerned, there is no intermediate position.*³¹²

He begins his argument by again appealing to what he assumes to be known truth—**don’t you know?** (vs. 16)—and then proceeds to outline what must be known, namely, that just as human beings are either “in Adam” or “in Christ,” so *in life experience* people are either **slaves to sin...[or] slaves to righteousness** (vv. 16, 18). It is a matter of to whom you offer yourself, for once you offer yourself to either God or sin (the only two possibilities as noted by Kruse)—**you are slaves of the one you obey** (vs. 16). He then states his overarching premise that answers this second possible objection about grace—**but thanks be to God that...you have come to obey from your heart**³¹³ **the pattern of teaching**³¹⁴ **that has now claimed**³¹⁵ **your allegiance** (vs. 17). In other words, far from being “law-less,” as Christ followers we have made the choice to give ourselves to God; **obedience, which leads to righteousness** (vs. 16) is our destiny. Obviously, this does not mean sinlessness nor even freedom from battling sin, but it does mean “[we] have passed from the service of sin into the service of God; [our] business now is to do what pleases God, not what sin dictates.”³¹⁶

Paul’s final paragraph (vv. 19-23) reiterates what he has been stating, reminding us again that we **have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God** (vs. 22) and the fruit of such “slavery”—**the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is**

³¹¹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 396-397.

³¹² Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 279.

³¹³ Our obedience to Christ is deemed a deeply felt, inward commitment, something we do voluntarily and sincerely.

³¹⁴ **The pattern of teaching** is a general statement referencing accepted Christian teaching, here emphasizing ethics. It is synonymous with **the traditions** (1 Corinthians 11:2) and is intended to describe that which is to mold our lives. The content of these teachings/traditions formed the core of early Church catechisms.

³¹⁵ Paul notes that godliness has claimed us...we have not claimed it. “The convert’s ‘obedience’ to this teaching is the outgrowth of God’s action in ‘handing us over’ to that teaching when we were converted” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 401).

³¹⁶ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 133.

eternal life (vs. 22). He also restates his key imperative—**now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness** (vs. 19).

His opening statement—**I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations**³¹⁷ (vs. 19)—has been variously interpreted. It is likely best seen as a sort of “disclaimer” for using the slave-master analogy because, though it illustrates the point well, it does have limitations with reference to being **slaves of God**. “Paul was evidently uncomfortable at pressing the metaphor of transfer of slave ownership too far; the idea of being a mere chattel and object before righteousness did not bring out sufficiently the personal character of the relationship with God established by Christ.”³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Or **in your natural selves** (*sarx*). “Their natural ‘weakness’ or ‘limitations’ must be a reference to their fallenness, either in their minds, so that they are dull of perception, or in their characters, so that they are vulnerable to temptation and need to be reminded of the obedience to which they have committed themselves” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 185).

³¹⁸ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 354.

ROMANS 7—

The core of Romans 7 was covered above. By way of review—

- **We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin** (Romans 7:14). The problem is not the law; the problem is the *sarx* as it comes into contact with the law—our inability to keep the law, as our unredeemable ego meets up with the commandment. When our *sarx* meets the commandments, it says, “No way!” It rebels and keeps us in dominion to sin. “The condition of the human heart is such that no law could help it.”³¹⁹ Our personalities and appetites are slaves to sin and external codes do not free us.
- **The law [is] weakened by the sinful nature...** (Romans 8:3). In defining a second reason why we must come out from under the law, Paul notes a limitation of the law. It cannot overpower the *sarx*; it has no inherent energizing ability to curb the *sarx*—**if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law** (Galatians 3:21); **“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”...indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence**³²⁰ (Colossians 2:21, 23). “The law is incapable of breaking the power of sin and conquering ‘the flesh,’ so that sin might no longer reign in the ‘mortal body’ (Rom. 6:12).”³²¹ Paul reinforces this idea in Romans 7:6 by referring to the law as **old** and **written**. By **old**, he means it is insufficient to produce in us the righteousness Jesus demands—**by**

³¹⁹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 550.

³²⁰ **Or are of no value, serving only to indulge the flesh** (RSV footnote). “Energetic religious endeavors could not hold the *sarx* in check. Quite the reverse. These man-made regulations actually pandered to the flesh” (Peter O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, pg. 155).

³²¹ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pg. 143. “It was necessary for the problem of the flesh, that is, sinful human nature, to be dealt with before the requirements of the law could be fulfilled” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 325).

calling this covenant “new,” He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:13). By **written**, Paul means it is rule based and not relationship based and one cannot legislate behavior. “The reason why the Law cannot make sinful people righteous is that it is an external code, whereas their sinful hearts need a transforming inward power.”³²² Rules never produce life. Try loving God or another person because of rules and demands rather than out of heart-felt relationship. It creates tension, discord, disappointment and guilt—**for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life** (2 Corinthians 3:6 [RSV]).³²³

- **Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting...for sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death** (Romans 7: 8, 11). Paul’s final reason for our need to be free from the law is an outgrowth of his first concern. External codes arouse the *sarx* and make it all the more rebellious—**the power of sin is the law** (1 Corinthians 15:56). “The relationship of law to sin is that the former is what gives the latter its power.”³²⁴ It seems like external codes and laws are valuable in controlling behavior, but they only give the *sarx* opportunity all the more to arise, deceive and put us in a death-like state if there is not the enablement by grace of the Holy Spirit. Let someone say to you, “You cannot” and guaranteed your *sarx* will say, “I will.” We may even get more than we bargained for—**did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful** (Romans 7:13, emphasis mine). Have you found this out yet? If not, try on your own strength to love

³²² Ladd, *loc. cit.*

³²³ “The doctrine through which we receive the commandment to lead an abstinent, virtuous life, is the letter (written code). This kills unless there is with it the Spirit, which makes alive” (St. Augustine, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 646).

³²⁴ Fee, *op. cit.*, pg. 806. “As Lightfoot insisted, ‘definite prohibition is necessary in order to produce definite transgression, in whatever form this definite prohibition may be given’” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 642).

God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself and let us know how far you get.

Romans 7 is typically divided into two sections—vv. 1-6 wherein “Paul argues that a person’s bondage to the law must be severed in order that he or she may be put into a new relationship”³²⁵—and vv. 7-25 wherein he argues that “the law is from God, but that it has nevertheless become the unwitting tool of sin.”³²⁶ Paul summarizes the essence of this second argument in Romans 8:3—**what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering.**

Romans 7:7-25 has been debated fiercely throughout Church history with little consensus of interpretation. The key question is, “Who is ‘I’?” Of the various interpretive possibilities, ³²⁷ the most likely is that termed the “rhetorical I” or “autobiographical I,” whereby Paul “describes his experience not because it is unique but because it is typical—the experience of ‘every person’.”³²⁸ “He begins by interpreting his own experience in the light of the account in Genesis 3. But he also assumes that every other man’s experience is similar to his own, and so what he says has relevance for all men in all periods of history.”³²⁹

In his journey, Paul describes three phases of wrestling with law—

- **THE HAPPY PAGAN—once³³⁰ I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came,³³¹ sin sprang to life and I died** (vs. 9). This describes the person with little or no understanding of God’s principles (law)

³²⁵ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 406. This argument uses the analogy of marriage and how the death of one’s spouse frees them from the law that sees a subsequent marriage as adulterous. His key word here in describing our relationship to the law is that we are **released** from it.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ See Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 425-426 for the four prominent views among theologians. See also Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 650-660.

³²⁸ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 425.

³²⁹ Newman and Nida quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 280. “In 7:14-25, Paul uses the first-person pronoun ‘I’ in a ‘gnomic’ or general sense of people who attempt to live out their lives in their own strength, but who find in those attempts not only frustration but also spiritual schizophrenia and personal disaster” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 641).

³³⁰ **Once** is vague (“at some point in the past”), so we have no indication when this period characterized Paul’s life in particular.

³³¹ **The commandment** references God’s precepts in general. **Came** means, “Came home to Paul’s understanding.”

and hence no concerted conviction of sin. It would certainly characterize most children.

- *Paul is not alive with the life that the New Testament writers so often speak about. He is alive in the sense that he has never been put to death as a result of a confrontation with the law of God. His lack of remorse and his enjoyment of the evil he does make up a sorry imitation of that which is life indeed. But Paul is emphasizing that the law puts the sinner to death. The person of whom he is writing has not died as a result of a confrontation with the law. In that sense he is alive.*³³²

“There is no period in life to which a man can look back as the time when he had no conscience. Still, there comes a day when we come rudely up against the demands of the moral law.”³³³ At this point, **sin sprang to life and I died** (vs. 9), meaning that he came to see the seriousness of his own sin; he realized that he was not good and decent before God.

- **THE BEWILDERED BELIEVER—I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do** (vs. 15). **Do not understand** references perplexity as to why he does the exact opposite of what he wants.³³⁴ Paul sees that his will is in bondage and subservient to sin, but he is not certain why and does not yet fully understand why the law is not helping. “No wonder Paul opens his explanation with a confession of confusion or frustration.”³³⁵ This leads to defeat (vs. 23) and despair (vs. 24). “Unless there is further enlightenment the believer in this phase of the journey toward freedom feels miserable, defeated and wretched...he is...yet under the law to some degree.”³³⁶
- **THE ENLIGHTENED BELIEVER—now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it...what a**

³³² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 281.

³³³ Hunter in Morris, *loc. cit.*

³³⁴ “Paul is conscious of a divided ‘I’ for there is an ‘I’ which wants the good and hates the evil, and there is an ‘I’ which acts perversely, doing what is hated and not doing what is wanted. The conflict is between desire and performance; the will is there but the ability is not” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 212).

³³⁵ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 406. In light of Philippians 3:4-6, this is best explained as being true early in Paul’s Christian journey.

³³⁶ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 72.

wretched man I am!³³⁷ **Who will rescue me from this body of death?**³³⁸ **Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (vv. 20, 24-25). The struggle with sin is no less in this phase, but now Paul understands that only Jesus meeting him at his point of need, not law, can effectively address the sin issue. “Paul has simply accepted that there is this dimension of the believers’ existence which remains part of this world, a dimension where the law’s good is constantly perverted.”³³⁹ **Who will rescue me** is not only a cry for eschatological rescue, but a cry for present deliverance as well. **Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord** indicates Paul “gets it.” He “gets it” that the struggle will continue; he “gets it” that the law will not deliver him; he “gets it” that he is dead to sin; and he “gets it” that Jesus makes possible sin not being His master by meeting him at the point of his struggle. He is enlightened rather than miserable.

- *As a “struggling but enlightened believer” I am able to conclude, as does Paul, that I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I [am constantly tempted to] serve the law of sin. Such believers no longer trust themselves. They gave that up a long time ago. They have quit trying to be holy and righteous...the believer in this final phase lives in grace—unto God.*³⁴⁰

³³⁷ “The farther men advance in the Christian life, and the more mature their discipleship, the clearer becomes their perception of the heights to which God calls them, and the more painfully sharp their consciousness of the distance between what they ought, and want, to be, and what they are...while it is a cry of real and deep anguish, it is not at all a cry of despair” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 366).

³³⁸ “Here in this verse appears one of the most sorrowful cries ever uttered by any human being...this cry of despair and the call for rescue (vs. 25) express the anguish and yearning of not just Paul alone...it is Paul uttering humanity’s cry of its own inability and giving voice to the call for rescue of many spiritually sensitive people” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 667).

³³⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 408.

³⁴⁰ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 73.

ROMANS 8:1-11—

The focus of Romans 8 is the Spirit’s ministry in assuring us that our relationship with God is secure and settled by receiving justification by grace through faith—from **no condemnation** (vs. 1) to nothing **will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (vs. 39). Paul also shows how “the Spirit battles against and conquers the hostility and power of the flesh, rescues the believer from captivity to sin and death, and accomplishes what the law itself could not do.”³⁴¹

- *Romans 8 is without doubt one of the best-known, best-loved chapters of the Bible...Paul’s preoccupation is with the work of the Spirit...in the first twenty-seven verses of chapter 8 He is referred to nineteen times by name. The essential contrast which Paul paints is between the weakness of the law and the power of the Spirit. For over against indwelling sin, which is the reason the law is unable to help us in our moral struggle, Paul now sets the indwelling Spirit, who is both our liberator now from “the law of sin and death” (8:2) and the guarantee of resurrection and eternal glory in the end (8:11, 17, 23).*³⁴²

Therefore, there is now³⁴³ **no condemnation**³⁴⁴ (vs. 1) clearly shows that God does not pronounce His judgment of wrath against **those who are in Christ Jesus** (vs. 1).³⁴⁵ In addition, the authority and influence of the Spirit appropriating Christ’s work has freed us and enables us to defeat sin’s mastery—**through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life**³⁴⁶ **has set you free from the law of sin and death** (vs. 2)—something **the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature** (vs. 3). Paul also states the purpose of **God...sending His own Son...[to condemn] sin in human**

³⁴¹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 471.

³⁴² Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 216.

³⁴³ **Now** emphasizes that believers are free from both God’s current wrath and His eschatological wrath.

³⁴⁴ Though God does not condemn us, we often live with a sense of condemnation as our conscience or the devil brings an offense to our attention with fear of punishment and no sense of forgiveness; it is a vague sense of failure and instills fear.

³⁴⁵ The additional relative clause found in the NKJV—**who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**—is based on weak textual evidence and is best omitted, as it is in most modern English versions.

³⁴⁶ Or **the principles by which the life-giving Spirit works.**

flesh (vs. 3), namely—in order that the righteous requirement of the law³⁴⁷ might be fully met in us (vs. 4). “In Him we in our measure begin to live the kind of life that God would have us live...able to attain a standard we could never reach in our own strength.”³⁴⁸

Paul’s definition of believers at this point is important—we are those **who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit**³⁴⁹ (vs. 4). Note Bruce—

- *Since believers are no longer “in the flesh” but “in the Spirit,” they should no longer live “according to the flesh” but “according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4f, 12 f). They have exchanged their unregenerate outlook (“the mind of the flesh”) for that which is proper to the children of God (“the mind of the Spirit”); it is their duty henceforth to “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 8:5-7; 13:14)...the Spirit is the sanctifying agency in the lives of believers: he wages perpetual warfare against the flesh, but he is more powerful than the flesh, and can put the flesh progressively out of action in those lives which are yielded to his control.*³⁵⁰

Bruce is describing what Paul refers to as **living**³⁵¹...**according to the Spirit** (vs. 4)—the believer’s *modus vivendi* or life level.³⁵² When we talk about **living according to the Spirit** then, we are talking about how we go about our life-style on a daily basis³⁵³—a life-style that is to be within the realm of the Spirit, clearly recognizing that He is also its Source.³⁵⁴ “It is clear that Paul conceives of the Spirit as a new indwelling power that manifests itself in conduct. The new life is the gift of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 6:25),

³⁴⁷ “Believers fulfill the law in the sense that they do have a real faith in God (which is the law’s basic demand), in the sense that their lives are definitely turned in the direction of obedience, that they do sincerely desire to obey and are earnestly striving to advance ever nearer to perfection” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 384). Paul also means that the Spirit enables us to actually experience and reflect God’s righteousness (right-ness) in our lives (*cf.* Romans 3:21-22). This includes, among other things, the ability to love and serve God and others with all our being (Mark 12:28-34).

³⁴⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 304.

³⁴⁹ That is **in accordance with all the Spirit means and represents**. “The reference to Christian behavior in this phrase shows that Paul does not separate the ‘fulfillment’ of the law from the lifestyle of Christians” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 485).

³⁵⁰ Bruce, *Colossians*, pp. 206, 210.

³⁵¹ **Or walking**.

³⁵² “To ‘walk according to the Spirit,’ is to live under the control, and according to the values, of the ‘new age,’ created and dominated by God’s Spirit as his eschatological gift” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 485).

³⁵³ “The word translated ‘walk’ in Romans 8:4 is *peripateo*, which literally means to walk around. It has to do with one going about his daily business” (Don Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 83).

³⁵⁴ At the risk of sounding overly basic, let’s remember that to walk in the Spirit is the same as to live in Christ Jesus. **Fixing our eyes on to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith** (Hebrews 12:2) is a reminder that we must never separate a walk in the Spirit from the Person of Jesus Christ, whose earthly life perfectly modeled this life-style for us.

and this life evidences itself in the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:20), which Paul interprets in terms of Christian virtues.”³⁵⁵ “The Christian is not a man who adds a number of good deeds to his life, he is a man who has received the gift of a new life which then grows and develops.”³⁵⁶

Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds³⁵⁷ set on what the Spirit desires (vs. 5) gives us a basic truth we must practice if we are going to **live in accordance with the Spirit** on a daily basis—namely, fundamental to living according to the Spirit is setting our attitudes in the direction of the Spirit...fully embracing His life and perspectives. This is not a static (positional) state but a fluctuating condition, the opposite also being possible for a believer—**those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires** (vs. 5). Having your mind set on what the Spirit desires comes through study and meditation of His Word and through prayer, as we come to Him and say—

- *I am Yours, Lord. Reflect Yourself in my thoughts and inner attitudes. Help me to know Your Word and Your thoughts, that I might think like You think. Let me draw today on the powers of the new self within. Let me remember the truths I know, that I might practice them. Let me think and act like what I truly am—a child of God, whose life is hidden in Christ.*

The result of each mind-set is also stated—**the mind controlled³⁵⁸ by the sinful nature is death,³⁵⁹ but the mind controlled by the Spirit³⁶⁰ is life and peace³⁶¹** (vs. 6).

Regarding **life and peace**, Pickerill notes—

- *A walk in the Spirit makes people glad they are alive. Life comes to make sense, to be worthwhile, and to be lived at the level it was meant to be lived. Why is this the case? The answer is simple. Life is no longer lived from the standpoint of striving and struggling. Our spirits are not disquieted because we realize that Jesus has done everything. Suddenly we say, “What do we*

³⁵⁵ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 562.

³⁵⁶ Lloyd-Jones, D.M., *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA, 1999 reprint, pg. 229.

³⁵⁷ **Mind** refers to our inner attitudes. “It is a question of what preoccupies us, of the ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us, of how we spend our time and our energies, of what we concentrate on and give ourselves up to” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 223).

³⁵⁸ **Or governed.**

³⁵⁹ It is observed that a mind set on the sinful nature is often not detected until “death-dynamics” become evident.

³⁶⁰ “Paul implies that the mind controlled by the Spirit does submit to God’s law” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 331).

³⁶¹ This is a reference to both current and eschatological **life and peace**.

have to ‘sweat’ about? For what have we been laboring all this time? It is not doing us any good.” So, we cease the struggle, yield to the Spirit, and in come peace, inner quietness, trust, and a knowledge that all is well in the Lord Jesus. A natural consequence of this is that we cease to upset everybody around us. We cease demanding and enter into peaceful relationships with other people. Does this make a difference? Indeed it does. It changes our daily lifestyle. Freedom prevails in all we do with God, ourselves and others.³⁶²

Furthermore, Paul reminds us how self-serving the *sarx* is—**the sinful mind³⁶³ is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature³⁶⁴ cannot please God** (vv. 7-8). “Those who allow the direction of their lives to be determined by their fallen nature are, so long as they do so, unable to please God, because they are fundamentally hostile to Him and opposed to His will.”³⁶⁵

Paul next reminds us of the only Source of freedom from mastery by the *sarx*—**you are not controlled by the sinful nature but are in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you** (vs. 9)³⁶⁶—and reminds us of our status as believers and some benefits that brings—**though your body is subject to death because of sin,³⁶⁷ the Spirit gives life³⁶⁸ because of righteousness³⁶⁹...[and] life to your mortal bodies³⁷⁰** (vv. 10-11).

ROMANS 8:12-17—

Paul’s next paragraph (vv. 12-13) returns to day-to-day life consequences of being indwelt by the Spirit and heirs of His benefits—**therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it... but...by the Spirit [to] put to death the misdeeds of the body** (vv. 12-13). “Like freed slaves who might, out of habit, obey their old masters even after being released—‘legally’ and ‘positionally’—from them, so we Christians can still listen to and heed the

³⁶² Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 87.

³⁶³ Or **the mind that is set on the flesh** (*sarx* [NRSV]).

³⁶⁴ The TNIV better reflects Paul’s intent than the NRSV—**those who are in the flesh**—because he is not talking position in this context (“in the flesh” vs. “in the Spirit”) but life-style dynamic. See also vs. 9.

³⁶⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 387.

³⁶⁶ **If indeed the Spirit of God lives in you** is better translated by the NRSV—**since the Spirit of God dwells in you**. The Greek construction states a fact, not a possibility. “The Spirit is not an occasional visitor; he takes up residence in God’s people” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 308).

³⁶⁷ We die physically as one consequence of sin.

³⁶⁸ **Life** here references eternal life that is the result of our justification (**righteousness**).

³⁶⁹ **Righteousness** here references our justification and the subsequent sanctified life that should follow.

³⁷⁰ **Life to your mortal bodies** references our future immortal physical bodies.

voice of that old master of ours, the flesh.”³⁷¹ But we ought not live according to the *sarx*...and we have the ability by God’s grace to not do so. Again, the difference is between a daily “death-like” or “eternal life-like” existence.

In vv. 14-17, “Paul chooses to transpose his exposition from the antithesis between Spirit and flesh to the correlatives Spirit and sonship.”³⁷² He begins by noting that having one’s whole life determined by the Spirit is a distinguishable mark of being a child of God—**for³⁷³ those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God** (vs. 14).³⁷⁴ “The daily, hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit.”³⁷⁵ Paul next notes that this sonship dynamic the Spirit makes possible is not one of bondage—**the Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again³⁷⁶** (vs. 15); rather, sonship wrought by the Spirit brings about intimate adoption—**the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba,³⁷⁷ Father”** (vs. 15). **The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children** (vs. 16) shows that “we have not only the status, but the heart of sons”³⁷⁸ and that “conversion [is] as much as anything else a liberation of the emotions.”³⁷⁹

The final sentence of the paragraph—**if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ,³⁸⁰ if indeed we share in His sufferings³⁸¹ in order that we may also share in His glory** (vs. 17)—shows that experiencing difficulty is part of the saving purpose of God. The remainder of Romans 8 is Paul’s development of how this works in our lives.

³⁷¹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 494.

³⁷² Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 458.

³⁷³ “The postpositive conjunction *gar*, which appears at the beginning of 8:14, is used not to introduce an explanation but simply to connect these additional proclamation statements of 8:14-17 with the material set out in 8:1-13” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 702).

³⁷⁴ This is a distinguishing sign, a result, not the basis of being God’s child.

³⁷⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 395.

³⁷⁶ This slavery marked by fear most likely references life under the law.

³⁷⁷ *Abba* is an Aramaic term of intimacy “given its particular resonance by Jesus himself (Mark 14:36)...and implied [in it] is the same sort of intimacy as Jesus’ own use of the word indicates” (James D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 461).

³⁷⁸ Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 648.

³⁷⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 462.

³⁸⁰ This is a title of dignity, the exact nature of which is left undefined but which assures us of “our place in the heavenly family where he is the Son” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 371).

³⁸¹ **Sufferings** is generic, indicating everything from the realities of life on a fallen planet to spiritual warfare to the relentless struggle with sin and the law.

ROMANS 8:18-30—

In this section, Paul continues the thought of Romans 8:17b—**[we are] heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory**—noting how the Christian can maintain hope for eternal life in the face of suffering and death. “In a sense, what Paul is saying in vv. 18-30 is that the Christian must go the way of his Lord.”³⁸²

He begins by noting that “the present and visible can be understood only in the light of the future and invisible”³⁸³—**I consider that our present sufferings³⁸⁴ are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us³⁸⁵** (vs. 18). Carrying on with his chain of reasoning, Paul next notes that **the [subhuman] creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed...[so as to] be liberated from its bondage to decay** (vv. 19, 21), that is for the “not yet” to arrive with the kingdom’s consummation. And why is it waiting? Because the Fall and subsequent Curse affected it too—**for the creation was subjected to futility,³⁸⁶ not of its own will but by the will of Him who subjected it in hope** (vs. 20 [RSV]). “Paul’s thought is clearly that creation itself must be redeemed in order that redeemed man may have a fitting environment.”³⁸⁷

³⁸² Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 509.

³⁸³ Leenhardt quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 511.

³⁸⁴ **Sufferings** “are not only those ‘trials’ that are endured directly because of confession of Christ (persecution), but encompass the whole gamut of suffering, including things such as illness, bereavement, hunger, financial reverses, and death itself” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 511). See also 2 Corinthians 4:17.

³⁸⁵ **The glory that will be revealed in us** “may mean that in the coming age all that is involved in our being ‘sons of God’ will become apparent and that this will be a revelation in us as well as to us” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 320).

³⁸⁶ Or **frustration** (TNIV); **vanity** (KJV). “Romans 8:20 gives us Paul’s commentary on life after the Fall. When sin entered the world, creation became subject to *futility*. The Greek word translated *futility* (RSV) is *mataiotes*, which means emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness, frustration or folly...in that a major part of creation is obviously people, Paul in essence is describing what it means for a person to live so as to draw life from this creation” (Don Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 76).

³⁸⁷ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 471. “Here in 8:20b-21, as based primarily on the good news of the Christian gospel, Paul extends that promised hope for God’s people to include all of God’s creation—apart, of course, from the fallen angels and from people who have rejected Christ and so have refused God’s salvation” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 723).

Summing up his thoughts in vv. 20-21, Paul notes—we know³⁸⁸ that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (vs. 22). He then segues to the fact that we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies (vs. 23). “For our mortal bodies to be quickened [we] wait and sigh, and the inextinguishable hope, born of the Spirit dwelling in [us], guarantees its own fulfillment.”³⁸⁹

In the same way, the Spirit helps³⁹⁰ us in our weakness (vs. 26) references the fact that we are not the only ones groaning.³⁹¹ The Spirit is groaning too by interced[ing] for us through wordless groans³⁹² (vs. 26). He gives us aid needed to see us through sufferings because we do not know what we ought to pray for (vs. 26). “Paul is referring to the fact that we who are Christians are not the spiritual giants we would like to be (and sometimes imagine we are). We are weak, and left to ourselves we will always be in trouble.”³⁹³ And what makes His interceding so effective? **The Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God** (vs. 27). “The Spirit’s groan is a highly successful one...He groans according to the will of God. This puts us ‘right on target.’ He moves us in the direction of glory. We are not headed only for suffering; we are being led on to glory through the suffering!”³⁹⁴

Vv. 28-30 are continuative, showing that during our time of suffering we not only have the Spirit interceding for us, but we have God’s plan and purpose working on our behalf—we know³⁹⁵ that in all things God works for the good³⁹⁶ of those who love

³⁸⁸ “How Christians know this Paul does not say. Perhaps we may say that the Christian consciousness of sin and redemption is in contact with the ultimate realities of the universe, and that no interpretation of nature can be true but one which, like this, is in essential harmony with it” (James Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 650).

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ **Helps** (Greek, *sunantilambanomai*) connotes the idea of helping carry the load imposed by our limited ability to pray.

³⁹¹ See Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 523 for an alternate view of what is being compared here.

³⁹² **Wordless groans** is not “praying in tongues.” As to who is doing the actual uttering, Moo notes that “the ‘groans’ are probably the believer’s own, inspired and directed by the Spirit. Paul’s reference may then be to those times when, in the perplexity of our ignorance, we call out to God in ‘content-less’ groans—whether expressed out loud or kept to ourselves” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 524). “**Wordless groans** suggests the intercession is silent and not oral as is speaking in tongues” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 352).

³⁹³ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 326.

³⁹⁴ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pg. 100. “There is also, Paul asserts in these verses, an intercessor ‘in the heart,’ the Spirit of God, who effectively prays to the Father on our behalf throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of our lives here on earth” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 527).

³⁹⁵ Or we generally recognize as true.

Him, who have been called³⁹⁷ **according to His purpose** (vs. 28). **All things** is generic, referencing anything in life, even our sin. **The good** is best understood as “redemptive good,” that is, our further maturation as God uses sufferings to **conform [us] to the image of His Son** (vs. 29). “Nothing can harm believers in the deepest sense of the word...but rather all things which may happen to them...serve to help them on their way to salvation, confirming their faith and drawing them closer to the Master...because God is in control of all things.”³⁹⁸

As the Author of our salvation, the depth of God’s purpose (control) for believers is then reiterated; Paul describes His commitment to us and His process of working **in all things** through the use of five important verbs—**foreknew...predestined...called ...justified...glorified** (vv. 29-30).³⁹⁹

- ***Foreknowledge** is simply the design of the eternalness of God’s plan. The fact that God has foreknowledge means that He knows everything and He has a plan...**predestination** means that God guarantees the plan. He not only knows the eternal purpose, but He guarantees that it is carried out. The Greek word which is here translated predestined is **proorizein**. It carries the idea of setting limits. I like to view it as God driving great stakes into history. History can go so far and no farther...**called**...God’s call in our lives is the temporal execution of the eternal plan...hence, the call is basically the definition of our condition as God currently sees us...we are saints (Greek **hagioi**—holy ones) in virtue of our call...**justification** basically means that God wants to reverse everything that is against us. It means that we stand in a right relationship with God. We have been made accepted in the Beloved. We are acquitted...and **glorification**. The most interesting aspect about glorification in this passage is that the Greek verb is in the past tense. He glorified us. Why the past tense? The answer is simple—God is eternal; there is no beginning or end with Him. He is Alpha and Omega. We pass through these various stages in our experience, but in God’s sight all is complete. We are already as it were glorified in His mind.*⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Or **we know that God causes all things to work together for good** (NASB); **we know that all things work together for good** (NKJV). See Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 527-528 for the technicalities and nuances behind each option.

³⁹⁷ That is, born again.

³⁹⁸ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 428.

³⁹⁹ “Paul here elaborates what he meant in verse 28 by God’s ‘purpose’, according to which he has called us and is working everything together for our good. He traces God’s good and saving purpose through five stages from its beginning in his mind to its consummation in the coming glory” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 248). Unfortunately, some of these terms are explosive and highly debated in biblical scholarship. See Moo, *op. cit.*, 531-537 or Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-334 for insights into the debate.

⁴⁰⁰ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104. “Everyone who is eventually saved can only ascribe his salvation, from the first step to the last, to God’s favour and act. Human merit must be excluded; and this can only be by

- *Scholars are fond of using the inelegant phrase “already...not yet” to describe an essential dimension of NT teaching: while “already” redeemed, justified, reconciled to God, and so on, the believer has “not yet” been glorified, released from temptation and suffering, and the like. Nowhere in the NT is this tension as clear as in this paragraph and nowhere is the solution to that tension more clearly expressed. God’s intention, Paul emphasizes, is to bring to glory every person who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Our assurance of ultimate victory rests on this promise of God to us. But Paul, ever the realist, knows that that ultimate victory may lie many years ahead—years that might be filled with pain, anxiety, distress, and disaster.*⁴⁰¹

ROMANS 8:31-39—

Then (vs. 31) indicates Paul is drawing a conclusion, a conclusion most scholars feel summarizes the entire epistle to this point (Romans 1:1-8:30 being the antecedent of **these things** [vs. 31]). And what is his conclusion? **If**⁴⁰² **God is for us, who can be against us?**⁴⁰³ (vs. 32). The implied answer to this rhetorical question is, “No one or no thing,”⁴⁰⁴ for **He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also...graciously give us all things** (connected with salvation, including glorification [vs. 32])? “Since God has done the unspeakably great and costly thing, we may be fully confident that He will do what is by comparison far less.”⁴⁰⁵ This confidence includes the assurance that nothing **shall separate us from the love of Christ** (vs. 35) and that **in all [sufferings and distresses]**⁴⁰⁶ **we are more than conquerors**⁴⁰⁷ **through Him who loved us** (vs. 37). “If God takes the side of the defendant, no amount of evidence for the prosecution can procure an adverse verdict...furthermore nothing in

tracing back the work far beyond the obedience which evidences, or even the faith which appropriates, salvation” (C.J. Vaughan quoted in Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 250).

⁴⁰¹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 536.

⁴⁰² **If** translates the Greek, *ei*. “The *ei* here states what Paul is altogether convinced is a fact as the ground of the confidence expressed in the following rhetorical question” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 435).

⁴⁰³ That is **against us** with any degree of success in terms of thwarting our salvation or God’s ultimate purpose for our lives. See also vs. 33.

⁴⁰⁴ This is the intent behind the list of specifics in vv. 35-39.

⁴⁰⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 436.

⁴⁰⁶ “Possibly a Hebraism, meaning ‘despite all these sufferings and distresses’” (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 171).

⁴⁰⁷ **More than conquerors** “emphasizes that believers not only ‘conquer’ such adversities...but under the providential hand of God, they even work toward our ‘good’” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 544).

the course of time, nor in the expanses of space, nothing in the whole universe can sever the children of God from their Father's love, secured to them in Christ"⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Bruce, *Romans*, pg. 169, 171. "The enumeration of potential obstacles to God's never-ending love for people who are 'in Christ Jesus'...gives to Paul's affirmation what Archibald Robertson has called 'a kind of solemn dignity'" (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 759).

ROMANS 9-11—

It is quite clear that Paul now turns a major corner.⁴⁰⁹ What would most likely be expected next is what he resumes with chapter 12, “exhortations to solidify and apply his theology.”⁴¹⁰ Some scholars are not quite sure just what to do with these three chapters, seeing them as a periphery or a parenthesis with respect to Paul’s larger purpose. Not so Morris.

- *Paul has completed a massive argument by the end of chapter 8 [but] important considerations remain to be treated. In the “thesis” of this letter Paul not only spoke of the gospel as “the power of God for salvation” but also said it was “to the Jew first” (1:16-17). He has not yet shown what this means. Again, for his doctrine of justification and sanctification Paul has consistently appealed to the Old Testament as sacred Scripture...and in that Scripture the Jews appear as God’s chosen people. How can he establish a system of salvation for Gentiles on the basis of the Scripture that gives a special place to Jews? If the place of the Jews as set forth in the Old Testament does not agree with the justification Paul sees in the Old Testament, then his position can scarcely stand. Paul’s whole argument demands an examination of the Jewish question...for if God cannot bring his ancient people into salvation, how do Christians know that he can save them? Will the Christian salvation also be superseded one day?*⁴¹¹

Notes Moo, “These chapters contribute to Paul’s exposition of the gospel by showing that it provides fully for God’s promises to Israel, when those promises are rightly understood...he insists against the presumption of many Gentiles in the community, that the gospel does not signal the abandonment of Israel.”⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ “Sanday and Hedlam note, ‘The difficulties of the ninth chapter of Romans are so great that few will ever be satisfied that they have really understood it’—which may be one of the more obvious *understatements* ever uttered by biblical scholars” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 801).

⁴¹⁰ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 547.

⁴¹¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-344.

⁴¹² Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 551, 553. “In Romans 9-11, Paul deals with the fact that many of his Jewish contemporaries rejected his gospel and the inferences that some of them might draw from this fact, that is, his gospel denies God’s faithfulness to Israel, does away with her special place in the purposes of God, and therefore implies that God’s word has failed” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 366).

ROMANS 9:1-5—

Paul begins the section by affirming his great personal anguish over what has happened spiritually to Israel⁴¹³ in rejecting Messiah—**I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish⁴¹⁴ in my heart⁴¹⁵** (vs. 2). He is not a bitter renegade nor does his ministry to the Gentiles mean he is anti-Jewish. Paul is so concerned that the Romans believe him that he notes that Christ and the Holy Spirit affirm his sorrow and anguish—**I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit** (vs. 1). He then goes on to further explain, noting—**for⁴¹⁶ I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ⁴¹⁷ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel** (vv. 3-4). **I could wish** “is Paul’s way of expressing his deep desire to do something for Israel...an impossible wish...and yet the expression brings out Paul’s deep concern for his fellow-Jews.”⁴¹⁸ He then notes some privileges and promises God gave Israel (vv. 4-5), “privileges which include ‘everything on which the faith of the Church is based, from which it draws sustenance.’ Their recital serves at the same time to underline the sadness of the Jews’ present unbelief.”⁴¹⁹ He culminates with the statement—**from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!⁴²⁰ Amen** (vs. 5).

ROMANS 9:6-13—

Israel’s collective rejection of Messiah now leads Paul to address the matter of God’s covenant promises to her should some wonder about their integrity and who is culpable in Israel not receiving Jesus as Messiah. It is certainly not God nor His promises that are culpable—**it is not as though God’s word⁴²¹ had failed** (vs. 1). To think so is to completely misunderstand Israel’s history, to whom it is God addressed His promises and who it is that embraces/has embraced the promises. Paul’s conclusion? **Not all who are**

⁴¹³ This would be Israel as a collective whole, not every Jew.

⁴¹⁴ Or **endless pain**.

⁴¹⁵ Or **in the depths of my emotions**.

⁴¹⁶ **For** (Greek, *gar*) is explanatory.

⁴¹⁷ Or **eternally damned**.

⁴¹⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 347.

⁴¹⁹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 459.

⁴²⁰ Or **from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever** (NRSV). See Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-350 for the technicalities behind the two possible renderings.

⁴²¹ **God’s word** references all His promises to Israel, not the Bible as a whole.

descended from Israel are Israel.⁴²² **Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children** (vv. 6-7). In other words, not every ethnic descendent of Abraham was intended to be the recipient of God's promises; furthermore, among those for whom they were intended, not everyone embraced them. He then examples his premise by way of a contrast between Isaac and Ishmael (vv. 7-9) and Jacob and Esau (vv. 10-13),⁴²³ concluding that **it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring** (vs. 8). "Has God's word gone awry? No indeed, says Paul. The present condition of Israel reproduces a pattern of divine action and human response which has been unfolded often enough in the past. Some have always opened their hearts to God's revelation, while others have hardened theirs."⁴²⁴ "Paul demolishes the position that the whole Jewish nation would be saved."⁴²⁵

Having established that **"it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned"** (rather than Ishmael [vs. 7]), Paul now moves down one patriarchal generation to Isaac's posterity,⁴²⁶ so as "to develop further his distinction between an ethnic and a spiritual Israel"⁴²⁷ and further show that God is not culpable with reference to Israel's failure to embrace Messiah; He has always been the initiator and Israel the responder,⁴²⁸ *i.e.*, His selection of Jacob over Esau contrary to ethnic tradition or anything either had done—**before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad**⁴²⁹—**in order that**

⁴²² There is a "spiritual Israel" (or remnant) within ethnic Israel. Because the Jewish contention revolved around being a descendent of Abraham, Paul broadens the argument by addressing Abraham's other descendents such as the Ishmaelites.

⁴²³ "Ishmael and Esau were not excluded from the mercy of God and both received blessing...but the nations they represented were not the people to whom God would give his revelation, to whom he would send his Son, the Messiah" (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-354).

⁴²⁴ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 177.

⁴²⁵ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-352. "The fact that at the present time the majority of Jews stand outside the inner circle of election, which is the Israel within Israel, is, since it conforms to the pattern of the working out of God's purpose from the beginning, no proof of the failure of that purpose" (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 471).

⁴²⁶ **Not only that** (vs. 10).

⁴²⁷ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 578.

⁴²⁸ And by insinuation Israel often responded poorly.

⁴²⁹ Paul's quote of Malachi 1:2-3—**just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"** (vs. 13)—does not contradict this statement. Vs. 11 seemingly references their intrinsic value as men and vs. 13 God's acceptance of Israel but rejection of Edom as His covenant people and heirs of His promises. "This bald statement sounds shocking in Christian ears and cannot possibly be taken literally...so several suggestions for softening the statements have been proposed...perhaps the best [suggestion] is to understand the antithesis as a Hebrew idiom for preference" (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 267).

God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works⁴³⁰ but by Him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger” (vv. 11-12). “Nothing human binds God...as Hunter puts it, ‘claims as of right on God, whether based on birth or on works, are futile’.”⁴³¹

ROMANS 9:14-29—

Paul once again realizes that he has a possible conundrum—**what then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!** (vs. 14; *cf.* Genesis 18:25)—and takes a bit of a detour (vv. 14-29) reverting to his diatribe style of earlier in the letter. “The doctrine of God’s free choice thus defined sounds very arbitrary.”⁴³² “The process of showing that the pattern of God’s dealings with contemporary Israel is consistent with the pattern of His dealings with the patriarchs raises the question whether God’s ways have not all along been unjust.”⁴³³ “If God decides apart from anything in the human being whom he will choose and whom he will reject, how can he still be ‘righteous’ (v. 14)—and how can he blame people if they reject him (v. 19)?”⁴³⁴ The section is once again theologically difficult with diverse interpretations.⁴³⁵

The first grounds for Paul’s **not at all!** in response to accusations that God is unjust finds its origin in God’s personhood and His high value in demonstrating mercy—**for⁴³⁶ He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”** (vs. 15, quoting Exodus 33:19). God’s righteousness (integrity) must be measured by this standard for mercy is a core aspect of God’s personhood.

⁴³⁰ **Not by works** stresses God’s divine initiative and the fact that His purpose is not dependent on people’s response.

⁴³¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 355.

⁴³² Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 561.

⁴³³ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 471.

⁴³⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 590.

⁴³⁵ “Throughout these chapters we must bear in mind what Paul is doing and not complain because he is not answering the questions we would like him to answer...he was arguing with first-century Jews, not modern Westerners. This will account for the omission of some things that we would like to see dealt with. Thus Paul argues for God’s absolute freedom and does not address himself to the measure in which we have freedom or how our freedom relates to God’s freedom...Paul is not discussing our freedom at all. He neither affirms nor denies that we are free” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-358). A number of Church fathers attributed this section to someone other than Paul.

⁴³⁶ **For** (Greek, *gar*) is both causal and explanatory.

- *Paul understood Exod 11.19b as an assertion not of an absolute freedom of an indeterminate will of God distinct from His merciful will but of the freedom of God's mercy...not an unqualified will moving now in one direction, now in another, capriciously, but the merciful will of God...free to fulfil its own purposes and altogether independent of men's deserving.*⁴³⁷

Conclusion? **It**⁴³⁸ **does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy** (vs. 16). No human effort can save us; when the dust of our efforts settles, we are still in condemnation. We are saved totally by God's mercy.

Paul's second grounds against the accusation **is God unjust?** is found in **Pharaoh**,⁴³⁹ whom God raised up on the scene of human history to demonstrate His power and further His purpose of global evangelism—"I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (vs. 17).⁴⁴⁰ Far from being unjust, God uses even His opponents in bringing about His saving purposes. "Within God's purpose, Pharaoh's obduracy served as the foil to set off God's redemptive power...the sensitive reader might already recognize the implication that Israel's rejection of the gospel was to be explained in a similar way."⁴⁴¹

The remainder of this section (vv. 19-29) continues the diatribe by addressing two questions/objections with reference to vv. 14-18—**one of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist His will?"** (vs. 19). Paul's answer will likely be less than satisfactory to moderns in that he never answers the questions! To Paul they are somewhat illegitimate, so instead he turns in the direction of "Remember who God is and who you are not!"—**but who are you, a mere human being, to talk back to God?** (vs. 20). He is not censoring sincerely questioning God when faced with such a theological quandary, but rather "the attitude of the creature presuming to judge the ways of the creator."⁴⁴² God is ultimately answerable to no one, and like Job (Job 38-41), our understanding of Him and His ways is at best limited—**does**

⁴³⁷ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 472.

⁴³⁸ **It** references the experiencing of God's mercy for salvation.

⁴³⁹ "Let us notice that neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself" (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 361).

⁴⁴⁰ See Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 361-362 on the complexities of Paul's theological conclusion—**therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden** (vs. 18).

⁴⁴¹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 563.

⁴⁴² Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 602.

not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for disposal of refuse? (vs. 21).⁴⁴³

Vv. 22-23 are extremely difficult for a number of reasons, including obscurities in the Greek text that make translating it lack certainty. What Paul seems to be saying—**what if God, although⁴⁴⁴ choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath—prepared⁴⁴⁵ for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy** (vv. 22-23)—is that God’s overriding purpose in history is that of mercy and “this is to be discerned in his wrath as well as his longsuffering.”⁴⁴⁶ “God works with those who are not in positive relationship with him to display in greater degree his own nature and power.”⁴⁴⁷

Paul closes the section by elaborating specifically who **the objects of His mercy⁴⁴⁸** are—**us, whom He called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles** (vs. 24). He supports Gentile inclusion in the salvation promises of God with quotes from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10, contextually applying “**My people**” to believing Gentiles, rather than those from the ten tribes of Israel as in Hosea. He then clarifies that **from the Jews** includes only the believing remnant, as noted in Isaiah 10:22-23 (vv. 27-28), and concludes by reminding Israel—“**Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah**” (vs. 29, quoting Isaiah 1:9). “It is a strong statement of the unworthiness of the nation and leaves no grounds for complacency.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴³ **Some pottery for noble purposes and some for disposal of refuse** references the fact that individuals and nations are put to different uses by God throughout history. Regarding the theology of this statement, Longenecker notes that “Paul argues that...a question as to why God does what he does in his selection of some people and his rejection of other people is far too inappropriate a question to ever be asked” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 819).

⁴⁴⁴ Or **because He chose**.

⁴⁴⁵ Or **who prepared themselves** (by their impenitence).

⁴⁴⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 367.

⁴⁴⁷ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 606. “We may confidently infer that the objects of his wrath are those who reject the gospel call, and, in this context, those of Israel whose hearts were hardened” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 387).

⁴⁴⁸ Paul does not further elaborate on **the objects of His wrath**.

⁴⁴⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 372.

ROMANS 9:30-33—

The closing paragraph returns to ideas taught in Romans 2-4, summarizing how it is that believing Gentiles are included in God's saving plan (**the Gentiles...have obtained a righteousness that is by faith** [vs. 30]), but only a remnant of Jews because "they followed, and persisted in following, a path on which salvation was not to be found; and they were inexcusable in doing so, inasmuch as God had made *His* way of salvation plain and accessible to all."⁴⁵⁰ And what was that wrong path? **The people of Israel ...pursued the law as the way of righteousness, [and thus] have not attained their goal** (vs. 31). In doing so, they put their trust in something other than Christ, and hence **they stumbled over the Stumbling Stone** (vs. 32), even as written in Isaiah 8:14, 28:16. "This chapter about Israel's unbelief begins with God's purposes of election (6-29) and concludes by attributing Israel's fall to her own pride (30-33). In the next chapter Paul calls her 'a disobedient and obstinate people' (10:21)."⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵⁰ Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 667.

⁴⁵¹ Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 277.

ROMANS 10:1-4—

Paul’s opening paragraph of Romans 10 gives explanation⁴⁵² to Romans 9:30-33, and the fact that **the people of Israel...pursued the law as the way of righteousness, [and thus] have not attained their goal...stumbl[ing] over the Stumbling Stone** (vv. 31-32). He begins by reasserting his deep concern because of collective Israel’s rejection of Messiah, a rejection that puts them clearly under God’s condemnation—**brothers and sisters,⁴⁵³ my heart’s desire and prayer to God⁴⁵⁴ for the Israelites is that they may be saved** (vs. 1).⁴⁵⁵ What is behind their plight? **For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge** (vs. 2). Israel has praiseworthy devotion to God, but they lack understanding⁴⁵⁶ as to what God did in Christ, even as Paul lacked prior to his conversion (*cf.* Acts 22:3). The reason for their ignorance? **Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness** (vs. 3). “They did not understand that they could not establish their own righteousness by their own efforts, so they *sought to establish* it themselves. Sincerity is not enough. If we are in the wrong, no matter how sincerely we believe we are doing right, we are going astray.”⁴⁵⁷

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (vs. 4).⁴⁵⁸ “Verse 4 is justly famous as one of the most succinct yet significant theological assertions in all of the Pauline letters.”⁴⁵⁹ Unfortunately, “the interpretation of this verse has been much debated down the centuries. It has been, and

⁴⁵² Paul begins with the Greek word *gar*, omitted by the TNIV and most other major English versions.

⁴⁵³ **Brothers and sisters** indicates that Paul wants his Gentile readers to clearly understand “he takes no delight or satisfaction from Israel’s fall” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 631).

⁴⁵⁴ Paul’s deep-felt desire found expression in prayer that God would reveal salvation to Israel.

⁴⁵⁵ “The emphasis of chapter 10 is on the human factors, on the need for an understanding of the gospel (5-13), for the proclamation of the gospel (14-15), and for the response of faith (16-2)...[Paul hopes the Israelites] will yet hear and believe the gospel” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 279).

⁴⁵⁶ **Knowledge** references experiential understanding, meaning Israel lacked both insight into and embracing of God’s salvation in Christ.

⁴⁵⁷ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 379.

⁴⁵⁸ Once again Paul introduces this verse with the Greek word *gar* (left untranslated by the TNIV), indicating it is an explanation of vs. 3.

⁴⁵⁹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 631.

still is, understood in altogether contrary senses.”⁴⁶⁰ The controversy is over the meaning of the Greek word *telos*, translated **culmination** by the TNIV,⁴⁶¹ and the meaning of **law**.⁴⁶² It is probably best seen as explaining why Israel was wrong in the way she looked for righteousness, namely, she failed to realize that “the saving work of Christ has brought to a close any attempt to attain righteousness by way of legalism.”⁴⁶³ Because of Christ’s work on the Cross, “Paul writes ‘*finis*’ to the sorry spectacle of man’s vain attempt to achieve life through works of law.”⁴⁶⁴

ROMANS 10:5-13—

- *Paul insists that his view of justification by faith is scriptural. It is important for him that it is not some new-fangled idea, but that God has always accepted people on this basis. So now he assembles a group of passages from Scripture to show that God has always accepted people through grace. All that has been required on their part is faith.*⁴⁶⁵

Paul begins with a reference to Leviticus 18:5—**Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “Whoever does these things will live by them”**⁴⁶⁶ (vs. 5). And the problem with this approach? “No-one has succeeded in keeping the law perfectly, and therefore no-one succeeded in gaining life this way.”⁴⁶⁷ By way of contrast to trusting in the might of your own hand, faith is the true means by which justification is received; such faith acknowledges the death and resurrection of Christ, as evidenced in Paul’s understanding of the broader implications of Deuteronomy 30:12-14—**the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”**⁴⁶⁸ (that is, to bring Christ down)⁴⁶⁹ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’”⁴⁷⁰ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)⁴⁷¹ (vv. 7-8). Furthermore,

⁴⁶⁰ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 515.

⁴⁶¹ Or **end** (ESV; NRSV). “*Telos* could mean ‘end’ in the sense of ‘goal’ or ‘completion,’ indicating that the law pointed to Christ and he has fulfilled it. Or it could mean ‘end’ in the sense of ‘termination’ or ‘conclusion,’ indicating that Christ has abrogated the law” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 281).

⁴⁶² **Law** most likely references external codes in general, with an emphasis on the Mosaic Law.

⁴⁶³ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 381.

⁴⁶⁴ Furnish, quoted in *loc. cit.*

⁴⁶⁵ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 381.

⁴⁶⁶ Or **will be justified by them**.

⁴⁶⁷ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 191.

⁴⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 30:12

⁴⁶⁹ That is, “**Do not say in your heart that Christ had never become incarnate.**”

⁴⁷⁰ Deuteronomy 30:13.

appropriating God’s message by means of a faith response is attainable—**“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”**⁴⁷² **that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim** (vs. 8). “The emphasis that emerges from Deut. 30 for Paul is on *believing*.”⁴⁷³

Vv. 9-10 clarify what Paul means in saying that **“the word...is in your mouth and in your heart”** (vs. 8), namely—**if you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead,**⁴⁷⁴ **you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.** For Paul, heartfelt (sincere) belief in and open confession of Jesus’ lordship and resurrection “marks out clearly the difference from a response characterized by ‘works’...the one essential condition of salvation is faith, the acceptance by heart and lip of what God has done in and through Christ”⁴⁷⁵

Paul concludes the paragraph by quoting Isaiah 28:16 to again emphasize the importance of faith (in obvious contrast to “works”)—**“Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame”** (vs. 11)—and reiterates that salvation by grace through faith is God’s only way, regardless of ethnicity—**for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord**⁴⁷⁶ **of all and richly blesses all who call on Him** (vs. 12). He concludes with a quote from Joel 2:32 that further clarifies **call on Him**—**“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord**⁴⁷⁷ **will be saved”** (vs. 13)—reminding us that “calling on the Lord out of a sense of inadequacy and need...proceeds from a genuine conviction that the Lord can be relied on.”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷¹ That is, **“Neither say in your heart that He had not already been raised from the dead.”**

⁴⁷² Deuteronomy 30:14.

⁴⁷³ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 615.

⁴⁷⁴ These confessions assume one has knowledge of the basics of the *kerygma* and is making a confession based on understanding the core of the gospel, not merely on a personal sense of a need to “fill an inner void.” (See Romans 10:14-15.)

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 616.

⁴⁷⁶ If it not clear whether Paul’s reference is the Father or Christ. Contextually, it is most likely Christ (*cf.* vs. 9).

⁴⁷⁷ Or **“Everyone who believes in the Lord.”**

⁴⁷⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 389.

ROMANS 10:14-21—

Then (vs. 14) indicates Paul is beginning a new unit of thought, as he elaborates vs. 13 and ponders the question, “Is calling on Christ really possible?” It is possible he concludes...but certain conditions must be met, for one does not call upon Christ in a vacuum. They must believe in Christ in response to hearing about Him and the gospel through preachers sent by God (vv. 14-15),⁴⁷⁹ preachers whose value Isaiah 52:7 affirms—“**How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!**” (vs. 15).

But (vs. 16) transitions Paul to a very blunt statement relative to Israel’s failure to obey the preached good news—**but not all⁴⁸⁰ Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”⁴⁸¹** (vs. 16). Israel’s missing link? Again, it is faith, even as Isaiah predicted. Paul then summarizes what he has been saying so far—**consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ** (vs. 17)—and tackles a possible excuse from the Jews—**but I ask: Did they not hear?** (vs. 18). **Of course they did**, he responds, invoking the authority of Psalm 19:4—“**their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world**” (vs. 18)—to show that “representatives of Judaism throughout the known world had heard it.”⁴⁸² Israel’s lack of faith was not due to lack of opportunity to hear the good news.

The chapter closes addressing a final possible excuse—**again I ask: Did Israel not understand?** (vs. 19). Paul’s implied answer? “Of course, Israel understood.” “The ignorance which is blameworthy has been characteristic of them; but the ignorance which would have constituted an excuse they cannot claim.”⁴⁸³ What is it that Israel understood but failed to embrace? “That God could very well act in such a way that the preaching of Christ would result in the inclusion of the Gentiles and in judgment upon Israel...this Israel knows from her own Scriptures; her ‘ignorance,’ then, consists in her willful refusal to recognize the fulfillment of these texts in Christ.”⁴⁸⁴ His supporting Scriptures

⁴⁷⁹ Paul’s series of rhetorical questions form a kind of chain of specifics to be followed if a person is to be saved. His repeated **they** references people in general, with Israel in mind specifically.

⁴⁸⁰ A litotes meaning **only a few**, a reference to the remnant perspective of Romans 9:6.

⁴⁸¹ Isaiah 53:1.

⁴⁸² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 393.

⁴⁸³ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 538. “Israel is simply stubborn” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 288).

⁴⁸⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 668.

come from **Moses** (vs. 19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:21) and **Isaiah** (vv. 20-21, quoting Isaiah 65:1-2).

- *In the text Paul quotes, Isaiah makes two points: 1) God has revealed himself to those who did not seek him nor ask for him, that is Gentiles...and 2) God has continually “held out his hands” to Israel, but they have proved disobedient and obstinate. To hold out the hands is a gesture of welcome and friendship. To do so “all day long” expresses the steadfastness of God’s mercy. Paul implies that the problem with many of the Jews in his own day was not a failure to understand the gospel but an obstinate refusal to obey it.*⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁵ Kruse, *op. cit.*, pp. 420-421.

ROMANS 11:1-10—

Romans 11 concludes Paul's discussion of Israel's failure to embrace Messiah, concluding that God is not done with her.

- *It is far from Paul's thought that being a Jew matters little. He goes on to show that, while in the providence of God Israel's sin and unbelief have been used to open up the way for the Gentiles, now the conversion of Gentiles will lead to the conversion of the Jews. The Jews still have a place in God's plan (Romans 11:26).*⁴⁸⁶

In the process, he shows both divine election and purpose at work and human responsibility. He is not interested so much in harmonizing how the two mesh, as he is in presenting them as equal options in the formula.

As noted above, all that Paul has been wrestling with in Romans 9-10 leads to the question of whether it matters to belong to Israel—**I ask then: Did God reject His people?** (vs. 1). Not only does the Greek construction behind the question imply a “No” answer, but Paul reinforces the “No” with a resounding—**by no means!** (vs. 1). Such is unthinkable. **God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew** (vs. 2). I, the very Jewish Paul, he notes, am an example (vs. 1).⁴⁸⁷ But, God's special selection of Israel as His covenant people, as His ambassadors of salvation, never meant that God fancied every Israelite would be saved—**at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace** (vs. 5). The fact that there is now, and always has been, a **remnant** (spiritual Israel within ethnic Israel [*cf.* Romans 9:6]),⁴⁸⁸ is then exemplified from I Kings 19 and Elijah's wonder if he was the only believer in Israel, to which God responds—**“I have reserved**

⁴⁸⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 397.

⁴⁸⁷ Paul is likely exemplifying himself as one of the believing (Christian) remnant mentioned in the following verses.

⁴⁸⁸ “True Israelites *continue to exist* within the corporate body of national Israel. There can be no doubt that he had here in mind principally those Jews who had acknowledged Jesus as God's promised Messiah—as well as those Jews who would do so in the future. But it also seems likely...that Paul left to God the more difficult and perplexing questions having to do with the hearts, minds, and commitments of other ‘remnant people’ (as known to God alone) who resided not only within the nation of Israel but also among the Gentiles” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 881).

for Myself seven thousand⁴⁸⁹ who have not bowed the knee to Baal”⁴⁹⁰ (vs. 4). Paul concludes the paragraph by emphasizing the antithesis between “faith” (God’s way embraced by the remnant, including believing Gentiles) and “works” (unbelieving Israel’s way), noting—if⁴⁹¹ by grace [the remnant is chosen], then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace (vs. 6). “If works of any kind, retrospective or prospective, come into it, then we *no longer* have grace. It is important to take grace seriously and not to let works creep in by some back door.”⁴⁹²

The concluding paragraph of the section (vv. 7-10) reinforces the idea that only **the elect** (remnant) have found God’s righteousness, despite the fact that **the people of Israel sought [it] so earnestly** (vs. 7). Why? Because their own initial sinful choices (Romans 11:11) led to God stepping in with an aspect of His current wrath (*cf.* Romans 1:18), that of hardening their hearts so as to seal their fate—a truth scripturally supported by a conflation of Deuteronomy 29:4/Isaiah 29:10 (vs. 8)⁴⁹³ and by Psalm 69:22-23 (vv. 9-10).⁴⁹⁴ “While it is certainly true that God did the hardening in verse 8, it is the people who do the stumbling in verse 11 and it is possible that the passive Greek voice here⁴⁹⁵ is a neutral expression...showing that those who failed God did not do so because they had been hardened, but they were hardened because they had failed him.”⁴⁹⁶

ROMANS 11:11-24—

“Paul has been arguing that a remnant of Israel will be saved, but only a remnant. What about the sinning majority? Are they lost forever?”⁴⁹⁷ **Again⁴⁹⁸ I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?** (vs. 11). Such is preposterous—**not at all!** (vs. 11)—when you understand what their stumbling means in terms of God’s bigger providential picture—**because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make**

⁴⁸⁹ **Seven thousand** is likely a symbolic number equivalent in concept to **a remnant**.

⁴⁹⁰ **Baal** is used generically to represent the Canaanite deities.

⁴⁹¹ **If** (Greek, *ei*) is better translated **since**.

⁴⁹² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 402.

⁴⁹³ **A spirit of stupor** references an attitude of deadness toward spiritual realities.

⁴⁹⁴ “What David prayed would happen to his persecutors, Paul suggests, God has brought upon those Jews who have resisted the gospel” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 683).

⁴⁹⁵ “**God gave them**” (vs. 8).

⁴⁹⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 403.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 406.

⁴⁹⁸ Or **so** (NRSV; ESV)...a conclusion to Romans 11:8-10.

Israel envious (vs. 11).⁴⁹⁹ And will it work? Yes...there is coming a day when **all Israel will be saved** (Romans 11:26)⁵⁰⁰ and their acceptance will bring even greater enrichment to God’s salvation plan as the number of people saved increases—**how much greater riches will their fullness bring!** (vs. 12).

Continuing to build his case, Paul next notes that though his ministry is primarily to Gentiles it indirectly impacts Jews, and no one can appeal to his ministry as in any way being a disdain to Jews—**inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them** (vs. 14). After all, Israel’s return to “divine favor by grace through faith in Messiah” will mean unprecedented blessing for the entire world (vs. 15), and in time she will indeed return because of the holiness (faith) found in the patriarchs, a holiness that Paul sees as positively affecting her future—**if⁵⁰¹ the part of the dough offered as firstfruits⁵⁰² is holy, then the whole batch⁵⁰³ is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches** (vs. 16).

Paul’s next paragraph (vv. 17-21) moves to a sober warning to Gentile Christians to not presume on their inclusion by faith in God’s family; he does so using a horticultural illustration found in both Philo and the Talmud⁵⁰⁴—**if⁵⁰⁵ some of the branches have been broken off, and you,⁵⁰⁶ though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,⁵⁰⁷ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches** (vv. 17-18). Furthermore, Gentile Christians, do not forget your spiritual heritage in Israel, nor think that God has fundamentally turned the tree upside down by bringing you in by grace through faith—

⁴⁹⁹ “Paul is saying that the salvation of the Gentiles was intended in the divine providence to arouse in Israel a passionate desire for the same good gift. When they saw the wonder of the messianic salvation, the Jews would want it for themselves...unfortunately, Christians have characteristically treated the Jews with hatred, prejudice, persecution, malice, and all uncharitableness. Christians should not take this passage calmly” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 407).

⁵⁰⁰ See below on the understanding of this very controversial statement.

⁵⁰¹ Or **since**.

⁵⁰² **Firstfruits** references the patriarchs, as does **the root**.

⁵⁰³ **Whole batch** references the Jewish race, as does **branches**. “Both the metaphors in v. 16, then, assert that the ‘holiness’ of the patriarchs conveys to all of Israel a similar holiness” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 700).

⁵⁰⁴ See Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 412 for some scholars’ criticisms that Paul’s illustration demonstrates a poor understanding of horticulture.

⁵⁰⁵ Or **since**.

⁵⁰⁶ **You** here is representative of all Gentile Christians.

⁵⁰⁷ **The olive root** again references the patriarchs.

consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you (vs. 18). Stay humble, watch your ego and remember that you are “in” solely by faith—**you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant,⁵⁰⁸ but trembles⁵⁰⁹** (vs. 20). “Everything all still goes back to his promise to Abraham, his choice of Israel; that still determined the course of his purpose and the character of his call.”⁵¹⁰

The next paragraph (vv. 22-24) brings to the Gentile Christians a warning that God’s salvation extends to them only so long as they do not repeat unbelieving Israel’s error; no one can presume upon God’s goodness—**consider therefore ⁵¹¹ the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness.⁵¹² Otherwise, you also will be cut off** (vs. 22).⁵¹³ “Paul echoes a consistent NT theme: ultimate salvation is dependent on continuing faith; therefore, the person who ceases to believe forfeits any hope of salvation.”⁵¹⁴ Returning again to “God’s equal treatment of all peoples,” Paul closes the paragraph by noting his hope for many Jews to come to faith—**if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again** (vs. 23).

ROMANS 11:25-32—

Paul has reached the climax of his argument in Romans 11:11-24,⁵¹⁵ namely, that Israel has not fallen beyond recovery and the current center-stage position of Gentiles will one day in the future be reversed with believing Israel returning to center-stage—**I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery...Israel has experienced a hardening in parts⁵¹⁶ until the full number of the Gentiles has come in** (vs. 25). **Mystery** indicates “something which could not be known by men except by divine revelation, but which, though once hidden, is now revealed in Christ and is to be proclaimed so that all who

⁵⁰⁸ Gentile Christians must watch the tendency to boast as much as the Jews (*cf.* Romans 3:27).

⁵⁰⁹ Show reverential respect to both God and His longstanding selection of Israel.

⁵¹⁰ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 673.

⁵¹¹ “In this verse, Paul states in more theological language an implication that picks up a number of points he has made in vv. 17-21” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 706).

⁵¹² **Continue in His kindness** means **continue to believe in Christ by grace through faith**.

⁵¹³ “The Jews lost their standing because they had come to believe that it was indefectible, and independent of moral conditions; and if the Gentiles commit the same mistake they will incur the same doom” (James Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 681).

⁵¹⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 707.

⁵¹⁵ The Greek text begins with *gar* (**for**), left untranslated by the TNIV.

⁵¹⁶ **Or a hardening has come upon part of Israel** (NRSV).

have ears to hear may heart it.”⁵¹⁷ What will happen at that time? **All Israel⁵¹⁸ will be saved** (vs. 26), meaning that the ethnic people group known as the Jews will as a collective whole embrace Messiah by faith at some undefined point in the future (even as they rejected Him as a collective whole when crying for His crucifixion). Citing Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9, Paul teaches that this “massive revelation and embracing of Christ by faith” will be in conjunction with events surrounding Christ’s Parousia, but where it fits exactly on the time line of end-time events is unclear (vv. 26-27).⁵¹⁹ Neither does Paul indicate exactly *how* they will come to this understanding, but following his earlier premise that it is generally by believing what one hears in preaching, Revelation 11:1-12 provides insight. In these verses, John discusses a major evangelistic campaign to Jews led by two dynamic witnesses as part of the events of the Great Tribulation. “Paul implies...a large-scale conversion of Jewish people at the end of this age. The corporate significance of ‘all Israel’ makes it impossible to reckon the actual percentage of Jews living at that time who will be saved...it will be closely associated with the return of Christ in glory.”⁵²⁰

The final paragraph of this section (vv. 28-32) presents a shift in Paul’s argument, so as “to draw out, and sum up, the implications of the preceding verses.”⁵²¹ He begins by noting that despite all the effective preaching of the gospel both by Christ and the Church—as far as the gospel is concerned (vs. 28)—unbelieving Israel has remained disobedient, and therefore **are [God’s] enemies** subject to His wrath, which Paul again reiterates benefits Gentiles (vs. 28). Nonetheless—as far as election is concerned, **they⁵²² are loved on account of the patriarchs⁵²³** (vs. 28). And how can Israel be sure of this? **For⁵²⁴ God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable** (vs. 29), that is, Israel can count on His faithfulness to the promises made to the patriarchs. Vv. 30-32 then restate how

⁵¹⁷ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 573.

⁵¹⁸ **All Israel** does not mean **every Israelite**.

⁵¹⁹ For Paul **the Deliverer** (vs. 26) is clearly Christ, though it is Yahweh in Isaiah 59:20.

⁵²⁰ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 724-725. “*In this way* (vs. 26) is used to indicate the way *all Israel will be saved*, that is, in the same way as the full number of the Gentiles come in. Paul’s meaning is that a hardening of Israel will persist until the full number of Gentiles has come in, and as the Gentiles are coming in, many Jews will be coming in also and in this way, and by the time Christ appears the second time, the hardness will have disappeared and all Israel will be saved” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 443).

⁵²¹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 579.

⁵²² **They** is again collective Israel, not just the remnant.

⁵²³ **Or because of the promises God made to the patriarchs.**

⁵²⁴ The Greek *gar* here is causal.

Jew and Gentile have benefited each other in salvation history, and how they both receive mercy (salvation)—Gentiles now and collective Israel in the future—**for God has bound everyone over to disobedience⁵²⁵ so that He may have mercy on them all** (vs. 32).

ROMANS 11:33-36—

Romans 11 closes three chapters in which Paul tackled a very difficult subject with a doxology that emphasizes more of what we do NOT know about God than what we do know, especially with regard to understanding the intricacies of His providence. “The world, with its conflict of races, religions, passions and even vices, may seem to be a realm of chaos; but when we see it in the light of God as Paul did, we see the signs of wisdom and knowledge, of a conscious purpose transcending human thought, and calling forth adoring praise.”⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ “God has so ordered things that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, being disobedient, show themselves to be sinners and have no other escape than through his mercy” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 426).

⁵²⁶ Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 686. His concluding, “**For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things**” (vs. 36) emphasizes “God as the Originator, the Sustainer, and the Goal of all creation” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 429).

ROMANS 12:1-2—

Therefore (vs. 1) is Paul’s indication that in light of all God’s done as outlined in Romans 1-11, we need to emphasize some imperatives.⁵²⁷ They consume much of the remainder of the letter, exemplifying concrete specifics of Romans 1:5—**through Him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to faith and obedience for His name’s sake** (emphasis mine)⁵²⁸—and Romans 6:13—**do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life**. “The legalist says something like ‘Do these things and you will live,’ but Paul is saying ‘Live and you will do these things.’ Only when the power of sin is broken by what God did in Christ can ethical admonitions be effective (and not simply increase sin).”⁵²⁹

I urge you (vs. 1)⁵³⁰ is not so much a command as an encouragement “to have people see for themselves what is desirable and do it.”⁵³¹ The urging is **in view of God’s mercy**,⁵³² that is, in light of all that has been clearly delineated in Romans 1-11; it is an urging **to offer your bodies⁵³³ as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God** (vs. 1). This is a call for positive, dynamic, dedicated, and consecrated living for God’s purposes as opposed to one’s selfish (*sarx*-oriented) purposes. **This is true worship** (vs. 1)⁵³⁴ appositionally defines what it means **to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice**; variously interpreted, it likely references the fact that this dedicated response is really the only appropriate, logical and reasonable one there is when we realize all God’s done for us in

⁵²⁷ “The transition from Rom. 11 to Rom. 12...is not a transition from ‘theology’ to ‘practice,’ but from a focus more on the ‘indicative’ side of the gospel to a focus more on the ‘imperative’ side of the gospel” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 745).

⁵²⁸ “There is an important connection between the long theological presentation of the gospel in 1:18-11:36 and the ethical section that follows in 12:1-15:13: the ethical section expounds important aspects of the obedience of faith required by the gospel” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 460).

⁵²⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 431.

⁵³⁰ Or **appeal** (NRSV; ESV); **admonish** (Lenski); **exhort** (Cranfield).

⁵³¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 432.

⁵³² Or **by the mercies of God** (NRSV).

⁵³³ Or **the whole of your life**.

⁵³⁴ Or **spiritual worship** (NRSV; ESV); **reasonable service** (NKJV); **intelligent worship** (Phillips); **worship offered by mind and heart** (NEB). It has the idea of worship which is thoughtful and rational.

Christ. “Believers’ offering of their bodies as living sacrifices constitutes their worship of God...what he means by worship has to do with the way people live rather than their activities in a cultic setting.”⁵³⁵

Paul next states what it takes to carry out this offering of our whole life to God—**do not be conformed to the pattern of this world,⁵³⁶ but be transformed⁵³⁷ by the renewing of your mind** (vs. 2).⁵³⁸ Our decisive transfer from being “in Adam” to being “in Christ” does not automatically negate our being influenced by this Age. There must be a life-long renewing of our moral consciousness, an adjusting of the way we think about/make decisions about everything in life. Only **then** will we **be able to test and approve⁵³⁹ what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will** (vs. 2).⁵⁴⁰ “The Christian has received the ability to prove what God’s will is in the concrete situation,”⁵⁴¹ something Paul believes can become so internal it is almost instinctive and does not rely solely on externally defined codes.⁵⁴²

ROMANS 12:3-8—

Paul’s first particular of being a **living sacrifice** is probably not what most of us would have expected—find your spiritual gifting and be a channel of its blessing within a local believing community.⁵⁴³ It comes by way of either a warning with prophetic authority or

⁵³⁵ Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 463.

⁵³⁶ Literally, **this Age**, “a power or force which molds character and conduct...Paul in effect recognizes the power of social groups, cultural norms, institutions, and traditions to mold patterns of individual behavior” (James D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 712).

⁵³⁷ “The use of the passive imperative here is consonant with the truth that, while this transformation is not the Christians’ own doing but the work of the Holy Spirit, they nevertheless have a real responsibility in the matter—to let themselves be transformed, to respond to the leading and pressure of God’s Spirit” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 607).

⁵³⁸ Paul begins vs. 2 with the Greek conjunction *kai* (**and** [NKJV]), which is often a vague conjunction (left untranslated here by the TNIV and by the NRSV) used here with apparent clarifying or perhaps modal overtones.

⁵³⁹ Or **discern** (NRSV); **prove** (RSV).

⁵⁴⁰ Or **what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect** (NRSV).

⁵⁴¹ Nygren quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 436.

⁵⁴² “Paul recognizes that a personally prescriptive motivation has to come from constant inward renewal, without, however, denying the law its role as moral yardstick and norm” (James D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 715).

⁵⁴³ Paul recognized “that acceptance of the gospel is bound to have a corporate expression” (James D. G. Dunn, *ibid.*, pg. 722). “By exhorting the Romans to think in a new way that will allow them to live as one body in Christ, Paul provides a concrete example of what it means to be ‘transformed by the renewal of your minds’” (Matera quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 930).

an imperative—for by the grace given me⁵⁴⁴ I say⁵⁴⁵ to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith⁵⁴⁶ God has distributed to each of you (vs. 3). In other words, do not have an opinion of yourself that is either too haughty or too low in terms of how God has gifted you, but realize that your gifting and contribution of it to the believing community are but one part of a bigger whole (howbeit an invaluable part). He then summarizes what he has been saying thus far—we have different gifts,⁵⁴⁷ according to the graces⁵⁴⁸ given to each of us (vs. 6)⁵⁴⁹—and goes on to list seven different gifts that describe how the body of Christ functions as a charismatic community—prophesying⁵⁵⁰ ; serving⁵⁵¹ ; teaching; encourag[ing]⁵⁵² ; giving⁵⁵³ ; lead[ing]⁵⁵⁴ ; and show[ing] mercy (vv. 6-8).⁵⁵⁵ With each gift Paul states an exhortation—if prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith...if giving, then give generously *et al* (vv. 6-8)—addressing a key area in which the sinful nature would want to keep the gift from operating effectively in the believing community.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁴⁴ **The grace given me** means, “My calling as an apostle” (*cf.* Romans 1:5).

⁵⁴⁵ The meaning and structure of **say** in the original Greek text is the basis of stating that this is either a warning with prophetic authority or an imperative by way of intimation.

⁵⁴⁶ **Faith** in this context is likely synonymous with **spiritual gift**. *Cf.* **each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned** (NRSV). Another view (preferred by Moo, Kruse and others) is that it “is to be interpreted as the basic faith of all believers...reinforcing Paul’s aim of minimizing division and promoting unity among Jewish and Gentile believers” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 469).

⁵⁴⁷ For a more complete understanding of each of these gifts, see *A Brief Summary of Spiritual Gifts* by Gary Matsdorf available in PDF through New Hope Christian College, Eugene, OR.

⁵⁴⁸ Or **specific spiritual gift**.

⁵⁴⁹ Or **having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them** (RSV).

⁵⁵⁰ Or **insight**.

⁵⁵¹ Or **helping**.

⁵⁵² Or **exhortating**.

⁵⁵³ Or **contributor**.

⁵⁵⁴ Or **facilitating**.

⁵⁵⁵ “The significance of mentioning the gifts which he does is that they all fall into the categories of speaking and serving (as in 1 Pet 4:11). This presumably means that for Paul at any rate the most characteristic expression of the grace of God was in these two areas—words which speak to will and mind and heart, acts which serve the needs of the more disadvantaged members of any congregation” (James D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 735).

⁵⁵⁶ Such are often referred to as “pollutions of spiritual gifts,” a concept more thoroughly discussed in *Spiritual Gifts Overview* by Gary Matsdorf available in PDF through New Hope Christian College, Eugene, OR.

ROMANS 12:9-21—

The remainder of Romans 12 consists of individual exhortations, virtues Paul intends to characterize all believers.⁵⁵⁷ They are loosely held together by the theme of love and emphasize Christians' relations with each other (vv. 9-12; 15-16) and Christians' relations with non-believers (vv. 14; 17-21). "New life in Christ requires new attitudes and new perspectives, as provided by God through his Spirit in response to our God-given faith—not only with respect to our own lives but also with respect to others."⁵⁵⁸

- **Love must be sincere** (vs. 9)—our love shown fellow believers must not be a mere pretense, a religious act. "The love of Christians for others was grounded in, and enabled by, the love of God expressed in the gift of his Son."⁵⁵⁹ It is thus authentic.
- **Hates⁵⁶⁰ what is evil; cling⁵⁶¹ to what is good** (vs. 9). Both exhortations are generalizations, but they also serve to specify aspects of sincere love—it must be absent of evil and demonstrate good toward the one loved. "True love involves a deep hatred for all that is evil, for evil can never benefit the beloved."⁵⁶²
- **Be devoted to one another in love** (vs. 10). This is a call to interface with fellow believers as if they were extended family, with heart-felt and consistent concern. "This is part of the redefinition of boundaries in which Paul engages—a sense of family belongingness which transcended immediate family ties and did not depend on natural or ethnic bonds."⁵⁶³
- **Honor one another above yourselves** (vs. 10).⁵⁶⁴ Believers are to recognize and praise accomplishments they see in other believers and defer to them as much as possible (in other words, you do not always have to have it your way nor have the last word).

⁵⁵⁷ Many scholars consider this a parenthesis, a stringing together of exhortations addressing ethical conduct.

⁵⁵⁸ Longenecker, *loc. cit.* .

⁵⁵⁹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 775.

⁵⁶⁰ Or **abhor** (NKJV).

⁵⁶¹ Or **glue yourself to**.

⁵⁶² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 444.

⁵⁶³ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 741.

⁵⁶⁴ Or **outdo one another in showing honor** (NRSV).

- **Never be lacking in zeal** (vs. 11). Although Paul does not stipulate the object of our zeal, God is most certainly the implied recipient. It is a call to not be hesitant in devotion to Him and His purposes because of weariness, sloth, fear, bashfulness or reserve. “The temptation to ‘lose steam’ in our lifelong responsibility to reverence God in every aspect of our lives, to become lazy and complacent in our pursuit of what is ‘good, well pleasing to God, and perfect,’ is a natural one—but it must be strenuously resisted.”⁵⁶⁵
- **But keep your spiritual fervor,⁵⁶⁶ serving the Lord** (vs. 11). The antithesis to the lacking zeal, Paul exhorts us to thoroughgoing, as opposed to half-hearted, devotion.
- **Be joyful in hope** (vs. 12). We are called to focus on **hope**, the expectation of sharing God’s fullness and that current reality is not God’s last word; such lifts us out of merely focusing on current struggles and the result is joy.
- **Be patient in affliction** (vs. 12). **Affliction** is any deep and serious trouble and **be patient** connotes active, steadfast endurance rather than passive resignation.
- **Be faithful in prayer** (vs. 12). Persistent prayer is necessary to successfully experiencing God’s kingdom. “The strong word suggests not the constancy with which they are to pray, but the effort that is needed to maintain a habit so much above nature.”⁵⁶⁷
- **Share with the Lord’s people who are in need** (vs. 13). **Need** is generic but with an emphasis on people’s personal financial and daily sustenance needs. “The first Christians carried on the strong social concern of Jewish provision for widows, orphans, strangers, and the community’s poor in general.”⁵⁶⁸
- **Practice hospitality** (vs. 13). **Hospitality** is an attribute of God that characterized the patriarchs (Genesis 18:2-8) and is a qualification for Church leaders (1 Timothy 3:2). It means to invite a person into your life and make

⁵⁶⁵ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 778.

⁵⁶⁶ Or **be aglow with the Spirit** (RSV).

⁵⁶⁷ Denney, *op. cit.*, pg. 692.

⁵⁶⁸ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 743.

yourself available as best as possible to meet their spiritual, social, emotional, relational, and material needs.

- **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse** (vs. 14). Turning his attention to relations with non-believers, Paul notes that sincere love is to manifest itself to the world as well. To **bless those who persecute you** is to ask that God's favor be poured out on one's enemies. To **curse** would be the exact opposite...to ask that God would bring upon them spiritual ruin, even to the point of eternity in hell.
- **Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn** (vs. 15). Most scholars feel Paul is returning to what is to characterize life among believers, but these particular exhortations can apply to both. **Rejoice with those who rejoice** is a call to respond to others' joy and blessing with sincere happiness for them rather than with envy or bitterness; **mourn with those who mourn** is to intimately identify (empathize) with others in their sorrow.
- **Live in harmony with one another** (vs. 16). This is definitely an exhortation with reference to relating to fellow believers. **Live in harmony** references each having a mindset that is "kingdom focused" with kingdom priorities, as opposed to being self-focused.
- **Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not think you are superior** (vs. 16). Pride, or an overly exalted self-opinion, kills relationships and kingdom focus in the Church community. **People of low position** are ordinary, socially unimportant people who cannot advance one's selfish desires. Associating with them is not seen as condescending, but as resisting the tendency to associate only with those who can advance your personal agenda (*cf.* Luke 14:12-14). "It is always a sign of the worldliness of the Church when its 'leaders' no longer associate as readily and freely with humble people both inside and outside the Church as with those who are socially superior, and when such humble people no longer feel free to speak with them as man to man."⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 644.

- **Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful⁵⁷⁰ to do what is right in the eyes of everyone** (vs. 17). Returning to interfacing with non-believers, Paul here expands the thought of vs. 14.⁵⁷¹ “Our lives are to be lived on such a high plane that even the heathen will recognize the fact.”⁵⁷²
- **If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone** (vs. 18). Paul realizes that we have limitations in terms of whether or not people like us, but what is incumbent on us is to pursue behavior and interaction with others (especially non-believers) that has a positive impact on them. “The double qualification (if possible, so far as depends on you) is striking. Paul clearly recognizes that such harmonious living with neighbors might not be possible nor lie within their own power...Paul neither presses an unrealistic ideal upon them nor expects them to compromise their faith for the sake of a quiet life.”⁵⁷³
- **Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath** (vs. 19). Paul reminds us to resist our strong natural urge to personally seek retribution. **But⁵⁷⁴** neither are we to allow it to go underground. We are instead to find an outlet, that of trusting that God sees it and will do something about it—it is written: **“It is Mine to avenge;⁵⁷⁵ I will repay,” says the Lord** (vs. 20).
- **On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink”** (vs. 20, quoting Proverbs 25:21-22). Exemplary and acceptable behavior not only resists personal vengeance but exemplifies positive behavior by giving your enemy needed help. The result? **“In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head”** (vs. 20, quoting Proverbs

⁵⁷⁰ Or **think beforehand**.

⁵⁷¹ **Do not repay anyone evil for evil** would have applicability to believers too.

⁵⁷² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 452.

⁵⁷³ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 748.

⁵⁷⁴ Greek, *alla* a strong adversative.

⁵⁷⁵ Greek, *ekdikeo*. “There is the implication that a wrong has been done for which vengeance is now exacted” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 453).

25:22). What this means exactly is unclear, but the implication appears to be that of turning enemies into friends.⁵⁷⁶

- **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good** (vs. 20) closes the list by reminding us that we defeat evil by not responding in kind. “Those who know what it is to be justified by God’s grace, know also what it is to have the love of God poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit. They know the new power that comes from the love the Spirit brings. That is why and that is the way they overcome evil with good. The way of love lifts them above all vindictiveness.”⁵⁷⁷

Concludes Longenecker, “The pattern of Paul’s ethical preaching and teaching (12:9-21) lays particular emphasis on the ethical implications that are inherent in the Christian proclamation of the gospel and the religious teachings and ethical example of the historical Jesus.”⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ See Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 454-455 for the various understandings among scholars. Regarding Proverbs 25:22, Waltke says, “Most interpreters agree that ‘coals of fire’ is a morally good deed, one pleasing to the Lord...the apostle Paul abstracts from it the principle to overcome evil with good...most commentators (also) agree with Augustine and Jerome that ‘coals of fire’ refers to the ‘burning pangs of shame’ that a person will feel when good is returned for evil, his shame producing remorse and contrition” (Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31—The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, pg. 331).

⁵⁷⁷ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 456.

⁵⁷⁸ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 942.

ROMANS 13:1-7⁵⁷⁹—

Although these verses are debated in biblical scholarship in terms of “what influenced Paul to exhort his audience to submit to the ruling authorities,”⁵⁸⁰ it seems that Paul is developing his statement in Romans 12:19—**do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is Mine to avenge; I will repay”**—by noting that the State is an instrument of God’s wrath/vengeance as it rightfully inflicts punishment on evil doers.⁵⁸¹ Why? Because **there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God** (vs. 1).⁵⁸² “As a manifestation of his common grace, God has established in this world certain institutions, such as marriage and government, that have a positive role to play even after the inauguration of the new age.”⁵⁸³

Let everyone⁵⁸⁴ **be subject**⁵⁸⁵ **to the governing authorities** (vs. 1) must be interpreted in light of its “limitations of intent” and against the totality of Scripture (see Acts 5:29). Note Morris—

- *It is to be borne in mind that Paul is writing in general terms to meet the need of the Romans and not legislating for every conceivable situation in which the*

⁵⁷⁹ “One of the notable features of Paul’s teaching is that he regularly combines doctrine with duty, belief with behaviour...according to chapter 13 we are to submit to the state because its officials are God’s ministers wielding God’s authority, and to love our neighbour and so fulfill the law because the day of Christ’s return is approaching” (John R.W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 317).

⁵⁸⁰ Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 490. He goes on to note that despite the various scholarly theories, “it is impossible to be dogmatic about the exact *Sitz im Leben* of Paul’s exhortations in 13:1-7” (pg. 491).

⁵⁸¹ See also I Peter 2:13-17. Paul is developing a “theology of good government” and reminding us that not conforming to the pattern of this world (Romans 12:2) does not mean to renounce all human societies. See Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 968-972 for excellent insight into the biblical theology and contextualization for today of this section.

⁵⁸² See also Romans 13:4 and Daniel 4:17.

⁵⁸³ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 791. “Rulers may misuse the authority God has given them, but Paul’s point is that that does not alter the fact that it was God who gave it to them” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 459).

⁵⁸⁴ **Everyone** includes Christians and non-Christians. “Paul enlarges on the state’s God-appointed role and on the role of Christian people in relation to it, although his emphasis is on personal citizenship rather than on any particular theory of church-state relations” (John R.W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 339).

⁵⁸⁵ **Or submit**. “To submit is to recognize one’s subordinate place in a hierarchy, to acknowledge as a general rule that certain people or institutions have ‘authority’ over us” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 797). “What we have here is not a dogmatic treatise on the government and the State, but a demand for loyal conduct in order to avoid a fresh edict” (W. Marxen, quoted in Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 768).

*Christian might find himself. He does not face, let alone resolve, the problem of when it is right to rebel against unjust tyranny...or what to do when there are rival claimants to the crown or conflicts between civil and religious authorities...he does not say what the Christian should do when the state fails its duty. He is not trying to cover every situation. His concern is authority... and he is writing out of a settled order where there is no doubt as to who the ruler is, and he is telling his readers something of the duty of a citizen in such a situation.*⁵⁸⁶

In light of God's ordaining of government (**consequently** [vs. 2]), **those who [rebel]**⁵⁸⁷ **will bring judgment on themselves** (vs. 2).⁵⁸⁸ By **judgment**, Paul is likely referencing civil consequences for disobedience to civil law as it is carried out by the State with God's backing, rather than eschatological judgment. He then explains further—**for**⁵⁸⁹ **rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right**⁵⁹⁰ **and you will be commended** (vv. 3-4).⁵⁹¹ "Secular rulers... 'administer' justice in keeping with divine standards of right and wrong...and rulers, by bestowing praise, encourage Christians to do what is good."⁵⁹² **But if you do wrong, be afraid** (vs. 4) indicates that no one, not even a Christ-follower, is above appropriate civil law. **Rulers do not bear the sword for no reason** (vs. 4) has been variously interpreted. It likely references the fact that government has God-backed punitive authority that we should soberly acknowledge.

Vs. 5 summarizes vv. 1-4, giving two reasons why believers should **submit to the authorities**, namely—**not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience**. **Conscience** (knowing and respecting God's will and purpose behind government) is to be our higher motivator, not just fear of possible punishment. "The Christian has a higher motive for obeying the ruler than the unpleasantness of the consequences of disobedience; the Christian knows that such obedience is in accordance

⁵⁸⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 458-459.

⁵⁸⁷ To **rebel** is to assert oneself in the face of government authority, to fail to acknowledge that you are not the final arbiter in matters of the State.

⁵⁸⁸ **Or they have themselves to thank for the punishment they will receive** (NEB).

⁵⁸⁹ The Greek *gar* here is explanatory.

⁵⁹⁰ **Do what is right** means, "Obey the gospel and its precepts for they are in keeping with righteous civil laws."

⁵⁹¹ Again, "Paul seems to take no account of the possibility of the government's being unjust and punishing the good work and praising the evil" (C.E.B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 664).

⁵⁹² Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 801.

with God’s will, and by rendering it will preserve a good conscience in relation to God.”⁵⁹³

This good **conscience** is to also motivate us in another area—**this is also why you pay taxes** (vs. 6)—for part of government’s authority over us includes exacting taxes—**for the authorities [collecting taxes] are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing** (vs. 6; *cf.* Mark 12:17). Conclusion to this entire section? **Give to everyone what you owe: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor** (vs. 7). Moving from fiscal diligence to attitudinal diligence, “Paul is saying that Christians should have a respectful attitude to those in high places, not for secular reasons such as that they are important or wealthy or powerful, but because God has made them his ministers.”⁵⁹⁴

ROMANS 13:8-10—

Continuing with the idea of obligation, Paul picks up the concept of **give to everyone what you owe** (Romans 13:7) by stating—**let no debt remain outstanding** (vs. 8).⁵⁹⁵ Not only are we to be fiscally responsible in our civil lives but in our private lives; we are to pay our bills.⁵⁹⁶ He then adds an exception—**except the continuing debt to love**⁵⁹⁷ **one another**⁵⁹⁸ (vs. 8)—that which Bengel terms “a never ending debt.” “Let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love—a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging.”⁵⁹⁹ In so loving **others**,⁶⁰⁰ we fulfill **the law** (vs. 8), that is, we capture the essence of what the Mosaic law is all about in that it aims at never harming another—**love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law** (vs. 10). “To live ‘in Christ,’ to walk ‘in love,’ is

⁵⁹³ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 225.

⁵⁹⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 467.

⁵⁹⁵ Or **owe no one anything** (ESV; NRSV). The Greek verb (*opheilo*) “often refers to financial obligations but was at an early time extended to include moral and religious obligations as well...it can therefore mean both ‘owe’...and ‘be obliged to’” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 812).

⁵⁹⁶ There is no indication Paul here forbids borrowing. He is instead dealing with repaying debts in a timely manner, in keeping with the stipulations of the contract.

⁵⁹⁷ This is a further outworking of Romans 12:9-10.

⁵⁹⁸ Some scholars see **one another** in the usual Pauline sense of “fellow believers”; others see it as including all people, a synonym for **others** later in the verse.

⁵⁹⁹ Origen, quoted in Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 812-813.

⁶⁰⁰ **Others** are specific individuals with whom we come into actual contact, believer and unbeliever alike.

something entirely different from living under the law and striving to fulfill all its requirements; and yet the law is fulfilled in it.”⁶⁰¹

Paul then examples with four commandments from the “second table” of the Decalogue what happens when we love—we do not **commit adultery...murder...steal...or covet** (vs. 9);⁶⁰² in other words—you “**love your neighbor as yourself**” (vs. 9, quoting Leviticus 19:18).

- *It has sometimes been argued that the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself legitimizes, and indeed actually, requires, self-love. The significance of ‘as yourself’ is rather that God addresses His command to us as the men that we actually are, the sinners who do, as a matter of fact, love ourselves, and claims us as such for love to our neighbours. And this form of the commandment indicates that the love for our neighbour which is required of us is a love which is altogether real and sincere—as real and sincere as our sinful self-love, about the reality and sincerity of which there is no shadow of doubt.*⁶⁰³

ROMANS 13:11-14—

Paul closes the chapter with “further exhortation to remind his readers of the eschatological constraints upon their daily conduct...in that his readers had entered upon a completely new phase of historical existence.”⁶⁰⁴ He begins with a call to spiritual diligence—**and do this,**⁶⁰⁵ **understanding the present time. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber**⁶⁰⁶ (vs. 11). The imminence of Christ’s return is given as the basis of Paul’s ethical exhortation—**because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed** (vs. 11)—as it is by Jesus (Mark 13:33-37), as well as Peter (1 Peter 4:7) and James (James 5:8-9).

Specifics of not slumbering include **put[ting] aside the deeds of darkness...not [participating] in carousing** ⁶⁰⁷ **and drunkenness...in sexual immorality and**

⁶⁰¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 469-470.

⁶⁰² **And whatever other command there may be** indicates that the four cited commandments are not intended to be exhaustive.

⁶⁰³ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 677.

⁶⁰⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 792.

⁶⁰⁵ **This** likely references the content of Romans 12-13.

⁶⁰⁶ **Or from your lethargic Christian life**, a life in conformity with this Age.

⁶⁰⁷ **Or excessive, raucous partying.**

debauchery⁶⁰⁸...**in dissension**⁶⁰⁹ and **jealousy** (vv. 12-13). Instead of slumbering—**put on the armor of light**⁶¹⁰...**behave decently...clothe**⁶¹¹ yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and...**do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature** (vv. 12-14).⁶¹² “Put in very simple English, Paul is saying: Do not plan for sin; give it no welcome; offer it no opportunity. Kick the sin off your doorstep and you won’t have it in the house,”⁶¹³ remembering that “we are living in ‘this present time’ under the lordship of Jesus!”⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁸ Or **unrestrained lust**.

⁶⁰⁹ Or **a self-willed readiness to quarrel**.

⁶¹⁰ A generic metaphor emphasizing the idea of being armed for battle.

⁶¹¹ “This language of changing clothes was widely used with metaphorical associations in the ancient world, and the NT writers adopt it as a vivid way of picturing the change of values that accompanies, and is required by, conversion to Christ” (Douglas Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 823).

⁶¹² Or **make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires** (NRSV). “In contrast to the beautiful and protective clothing which is Christ, Paul refers to our ugly, self-centred nature (*sarx*). It has not been eradicated; it is still there. It also still has clamant desires” (John R.W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 353).

⁶¹³ Foreman, quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 474.

⁶¹⁴ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 985.

ROMANS 14:1-12—

Paul begins here a section that takes us through Romans 15:13 that deals with the matter of differences of perspective on various issues between **those whose faith is weak**⁶¹⁵ (14:1) and **we who are strong** (15:1). We are not sure if Paul is addressing a general, universal matter he has observed throughout the churches or a matter specific to the Roman church. Regarding Paul's bottom line—the strong **must not treat with contempt** the weak, and the weak **must not judge** the strong (vs. 3)—Morris notes—

- *The apostle sides with neither the weak nor the strong; clearly he thought that unity was more important than holding either position. The situation is not like that in Galatians where he contended vigorously against legalists; here both groups were evidently clear about the centrality of justification by faith; it was the way that was put into practice that was at stake...Paul gives us advice as to how we are to live with others who love the Lord but who do not see what we are doing as the ideal way of living out the Christian faith.*⁶¹⁶

The positions held are with reference to morally neutral matters (**disputable matters** [vs. 1])⁶¹⁷...not “moral absolutes.” “This has to do with situations where there are differences of understanding or practice about matters having to do primarily with social background, personal opinion, or personal preference—that is...matters that are neither required or not prohibited to believers in Jesus.”⁶¹⁸

The first particular addressed is that of differences of perspective over food matters—**one person's faith allows them to eat everything, but another person, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables** (vs. 1).⁶¹⁹ Believers bring habits and ways of thinking to salvation and less mature believers often cannot discern when something is relative or

⁶¹⁵ **Those whose faith is weak** are those whose faith cannot sustain them in certain kinds of conduct. “He does not understand that when the meaning of justification by faith is grasped questions like the use of meat and wine and special days become irrelevant” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 477).

⁶¹⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 475, 477.

⁶¹⁷ Or **opinions** (NRSV, ESV); **doubtful things** (NKJV).

⁶¹⁸ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 1001.

⁶¹⁹ “They perhaps eat only vegetables because of vegetarian principles, but more probably in order to avoid eating the flesh of animals that had been sacrificed to pagan deities or not properly slaughtered according to Jewish law” (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 231).

even irrelevant to God, so they cannot let it go. The exhortation to the strong is **accept⁶²⁰ [them] without quarreling⁶²¹ over disputable matters** (vs. 1), which Paul will expand in vs. 3 in asking both parties to stop criticizing—**the one who eats everything must not treat with contempt⁶²² the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge⁶²³ the one who does** (vs. 3). Why not be such a critic in morally neutral matters?⁶²⁴ Because **God has accepted that person** (vs. 3) and He alone is their Master; He alone determines if they have sinned in such matters (vs. 4).

The second specific addressed is that of **some consider[ing] one day more sacred than another...[while] others consider every day alike** (vs. 5). “Pinning down the exact nature of this disagreement over ‘days’ is difficult since Paul does not elaborate.”⁶²⁵ Be that as it may, Paul’s point is that **everyone should be convinced in their own mind** (vs. 5); in other words, each should have their own personal convictions but such personal convictions should not be used to intimidate others or be demanded of others within the Christian community. “Here clearly implied is Paul’s firm recognition that Christians will disagree with one another on important issues, and yet each can be convinced of the rightness of their position.”⁶²⁶ Lest this become a “moral free for all” and lines blur between the biblically morally neutral and the biblically morally restricted, Paul notes—**those who regard one day as special do so to the Lord. Those who eat meat do so to the Lord** (vs. 6, emphasis mine). In other words, Paul assumes that each has rightly discerned the matter at hand to be morally neutral to God, so it is simply a matter of personal perspective and not His absolute perspective.

He closes the paragraph by noting that the Christian is not a law unto themselves, nor should they “play Holy Spirit” for another—**for we do not live to ourselves alone and we do not die to ourselves alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord** (vv. 7-8). In such matters, you cannot claim freedom for yourself and not allow freedom for another. “If the strong should not try to force the weak into a

⁶²⁰ **Accept** means to take into friendship; to not make one feel barely tolerated.

⁶²¹ Or **without starting an argument**.

⁶²² Or **have a disdainful, condescending attitude** (priding yourself on your enlightened, “liberal” perspective); **despise** (NRSV).

⁶²³ Or **must not hold out your personal standards of piety as God’s only standards**.

⁶²⁴ Contra James 5:19-20.

⁶²⁵ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 842.

⁶²⁶ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 814.

frightening liberty where guidelines are far less clearly drawn, neither should the weak seek to restrict the strong within the limits of their own more tightly defined liberty.”⁶²⁷ **For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living** (vs. 9) reminds us that as Lord over all, Jesus is fully capable of helping each individual make determinant decisions in such matters.

The clear conclusion? **You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat your brother or sister with contempt?** (vs. 10). No one is to make slighting or condemning remarks of another believer, nor cast doubt on the spiritual devotion of any member of the spiritual family simply for having different convictions with regard to such matters. Again, it is because judgment in these matters belongs to God alone—**for we will all stand before God’s judgment seat** (vs. 10)—the One before whom **we will all give an account of ourselves** (vs. 12).

ROMANS 14:13-23—

“Paul, having asserted as plainly as possible the freedom of a Christian, now goes on to show how on occasion that freedom may, and should, be limited—but limited voluntarily.”⁶²⁸ He begins with an exhortation to both the strong and the weak—**therefore**⁶²⁹ **let us stop passing judgment on one another** (vs. 13)—but then goes on to address the strong—**instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister** (vs. 13); he addresses the strong knowing it is easier for them to change their practice because of their greater scope of understanding and maturity. He notes that the most important principle at stake is not practicing what the strong have perfect liberty to practice but giving consideration to the effect of certain behaviors on less mature believers. He then states the fundamental principle in all this—**nothing is unclean in itself.**⁶³⁰ **But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean** (vs. 14)—that is, even if some people can intellectually grasp that **nothing is unclean in itself**, they “cannot always ‘existentially’ grasp such truth—

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁸ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 233.

⁶²⁹ **Therefore** indicates the exhortation is based on what Paul has just said about each giving account to God.

⁶³⁰ This references the fact that either no food is inherently unclean or that no food is ritually defiled since Christ changed the dietary laws (Mark 7:1-14; Acts 10:9-15).

particularly when it runs so counter to a long and strongly held tradition basic to their own identity.”⁶³¹

Paul next explains what is behind not putting a stumbling block or obstacle in a fellow believer’s way, namely, love cares more about the spiritual integrity of a weaker brother or sister than about exercising personal liberties the weaker just cannot get past—**if your brother or sister is distressed**⁶³² **because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy**⁶³³ **your brother or sister for whom Christ died** (vs. 15). Furthermore, even unbelievers can be negatively affected if they see some members not caring for the feelings and perspectives of others within the Church—**therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil** (vs. 16). Besides, it is not one expressing their personal freedoms that attests to the presence of God’s kingdom; rather, the kingdom’s presence is attested by **righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit** (vs. 17) and it is the reflection and pursuit in one’s life of these attributes that **is pleasing to God and receives human approval** (vs. 18). “The person in question, being pleasing to God, has survived the test and should be approved by his fellows, believers and unbelievers alike.”⁶³⁴

Paul then gives an exhortation as a result of this understanding—**let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace**⁶³⁵ **and to mutual edification**⁶³⁶ (vs. 19)—and calls the strong to maintain big picture perspective—**do not destroy**⁶³⁷ **the work of God**⁶³⁸ **for the sake of food** (vs. 20). So that the weak do not think “they are right,” Paul reiterates that indeed **all food is clean** (vs. 20), but that is not the defining issue; it is the impact of the liberties of the strong on the weak—**but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink**

⁶³¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 853. “The ‘strong’, understanding their freedom in Christ, regard no foods as unclean, but the ‘weak’ still regard some foods as unclean, and Paul says, ‘for that person it is unclean’. The ‘weak’ cannot eat such foods without violating their consciences, and so while the food itself is clean, for them it is unclean” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 520).

⁶³² Or **deeply hurt; is being injured** (NRSV). Paul is likely intimating that more than just seeing the strong participate in such activity, the strong are encouraging the weak to do so themselves. Hence the distress.

⁶³³ Or **cause spiritual grief and self-condemnation**. Some commentators see it as even stronger—**causing spiritual ruin**.

⁶³⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 489.

⁶³⁵ This is peace with one another.

⁶³⁶ **Edification** references building people up; helping them rather than criticizing or despising them.

⁶³⁷ Or **do not negatively affect** by irresponsibly exercising liberties.

⁶³⁸ **The work of God** references what God is doing in the life of weaker Christ-followers.

wine⁶³⁹ or do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall (vv. 20-21).⁶⁴⁰ “In human relationships absolute rules are dangerous, since any principle governing human conduct must take account of the circumstances in specific instances...over against the ruling that all is clean, Paul lays out the principle of self-restricted liberty.”⁶⁴¹

The last paragraph of Romans 14 shifts to a final personal application—**so whatever you⁶⁴² believe about these things keep between yourself and God** (vs. 22). Paul wants us to keep personal convictions and liberties as private as possible, avoiding parading them before others;⁶⁴³ he is also concerned that we not condemn ourselves because others have a different perspective than we—**blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by what they approve** (vs. 22). “The balance was a difficult one to maintain between Christian liberty and love, and Paul must have been conscious of how easily the full range of liberty can lapse into legalism at one end, just as easily as it can lapse into licentiousness at the other.”⁶⁴⁴ Finally, the weak are not to be compelled to violate their conscience or participate in what they do not personally embrace—**those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin** (vs. 23). “The apostle is condemning conduct that springs from motives like selfishness or greed or fear.”⁶⁴⁵

⁶³⁹ It is unknown as to why Paul brings in the matter of drinking wine.

⁶⁴⁰ This verse clearly shows that the strong are not being asked to abstain completely from their liberties but rather to take account of their “watching audience” and above all, to not encourage the weaker to violate their convictions by participating.

⁶⁴¹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 833.

⁶⁴² **You** is singular and emphatic in the Greek text.

⁶⁴³ “Paul concludes by drawing a distinction between belief and action, that is, between private conviction and public behaviour” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 368).

⁶⁴⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 833.

⁶⁴⁵ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 492.

ROMANS 15:1-6—

Paul continues with the matter of differences of perspective between the strong and the weak,⁶⁴⁶ with an emphasis on unity and not being self-centered—**we who are strong ought to bear⁶⁴⁷ with the failings⁶⁴⁸ of the weak and not to please ourselves⁶⁴⁹** (vs. 1). Classifying himself as among the strong, Paul reminds them that having a mature attitude is crucial and that because their maturity is the result of God’s work in them, they have a two-fold obligation—**to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please [themselves].**

- *It is a constant in the infinite variety of human cultures that the strong tend to use their strength as their own. Even in the Christian church they all too easily see it as unfair that their conduct should be modified on account of considerations that seem of no importance to them, even though those considerations form insurmountable problems for their weak brothers.*⁶⁵⁰

Paul then uses the particular situation at hand to give a universal exhortation to all Christ-followers—**we should all please our neighbors⁶⁵¹ for their good⁶⁵²** (vs. 2) and brings in Christ as a supporting example of such serving—**for even Christ did not please Himself** (vs. 3); more specifically, Christ’s selflessness is seen in His bearing God’s insults as He served humanity—**“The insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me”** (vs. 3, quoting Psalm 69:9).⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁶ The Greek text begins with *de* (**furthermore**), left untranslated by the TNIV.

⁶⁴⁷ **To bear** has the idea of assuming the responsibility of being sure the weak are treated like family and encouraged along in their spiritual growth to the point of themselves becoming strong. **We who are strong ought to bear the burdens that the weak make for themselves and us** (Moffatt).

⁶⁴⁸ **Or with the spiritual immaturity.**

⁶⁴⁹ **Not to please ourselves** does not mean we do not participate in anything that is personally enjoyable; it means rather to not be self-focused.

⁶⁵⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 496.

⁶⁵¹ This references believer and unbeliever alike.

⁶⁵² That is, help them come to Christ if an unbeliever and come to spiritual maturity if they are a Christ-follower. Implied also would be not enabling the weak with reference to their spiritual immaturity (their “weakness”).

⁶⁵³ Many commentators feel that by citing this example, it puts in perspective the “suffering” of the strong in occasionally voluntarily giving up the practice of their liberties.

Vs. 4—**for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us**—is a bit of a detour to the main argument, as Paul takes advantage of having quoted from the Old Testament to remind us that “the OT...continues to play a central role in helping Christians to understand the climax of salvation history and their responsibilities as the New Covenant people of God.”⁶⁵⁴ Among the central roles it plays is that of teaching **endurance** and providing **encouragement** that **we might have hope** (vs. 4).

The section concludes with a “prayer-wish” that serves as an indirect exhortation—**may...God...give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had** (vs. 5). **The same attitude** is not saying that the strong and the weak must agree on **disputable matters**; rather, it references their focusing on what they can agree on—serving a fallen world with the truth of the gospel as Jesus did. The result? **With one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** (vs. 6). “Such united praise of God will make impossible the despising and the passing judgment to which 14.3 referred and the heartlessness which can cause a brother to be grieved and for a mere food’s sake destroy the work of God.”⁶⁵⁵

ROMANS 15:7-13—

In this section, Paul picks up the main concept from the previous section but at the same time shifts focus. “Kasemann points out that in this section ‘the tensions and debates vanish completely from view’ and that Paul is proceeding to show that his doctrine of justification is seen in God’s having mercy on the Gentiles.”⁶⁵⁶ He begins by noting that acceptance of fellow Christ-followers with differences of perspective is a two-way street—**accept⁶⁵⁷ one another** (vs. 7); such may not be easy but **Christ accepted [us]** (vs. 7), so how can we do any less of each other? As a matter of fact, His acceptance was in the form of becoming a servant to both **the Jews** and **the Gentiles** (vv. 8-9), “so no member of the church may safely be despised.”⁶⁵⁸ Vv. 8-9 are then supported with a series of texts from 2 Samuel, Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah, calling “all the

⁶⁵⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 869.

⁶⁵⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pg. 738.

⁶⁵⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 502.

⁶⁵⁷ Or **welcome** (NRSV; ESV). It denotes wholehearted acceptance.

⁶⁵⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 504.

recognized divisions of Scripture to witness to the point he is making, that the Gentiles have their place in God’s salvation.”⁶⁵⁹

The section closes with yet another prayer-wish for uninhibited devotion to Christ, which Paul sees as the “norm” for following Christ—**may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit** (vs. 13).

ROMANS 15:14-22—

These verses begin a final section of the epistle that runs through chapter 16, giving Paul’s reason for writing, his travel plans and his personal greetings to several friends. He begins with a commendation of the Romans—**I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness,⁶⁶⁰ filled with knowledge⁶⁶¹ and competent to instruct one another⁶⁶²** (vs. 14)— thus “assur[ing] the Roman Christians that the teaching in his letter has not been given because he imagined they were incapable of teaching one another. He is also well aware of their moral and intellectual quality.”⁶⁶³

If they are to be so commended, why such audacious writing? It is because Paul wants to enlarge the horizons of their understanding and remind them of some fundamental truths—**I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again** (vs. 15);⁶⁶⁴ again, his writing stems from his apostolic calling to the Gentiles and the passion he carries that they come to Christ—**I have written...because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles...so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit** (vv. 15-16). As a “pioneer evangelist” (Morris),⁶⁶⁵ Paul’s personal ministry calling and constant ambition

⁶⁵⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 505.

⁶⁶⁰ Or **outstandingly good**.

⁶⁶¹ Or **intellectually informed in the faith**.

⁶⁶² Or **competent to admonish so as to correct what’s amiss with one another**. The three together affirm they are adept at providing pastoral care and oversight in the church.

⁶⁶³ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 244.

⁶⁶⁴ Before concluding, Paul “wonders whether they may have been offended by the fact, contents or tone of his letter. Has he been presumptuous to address a church he did not found and has never visited? Has he given the impression that he regards their Christianity as defective and immature? Has he been too outspoken?” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 377).

⁶⁶⁵ This observation is based on Paul’s **I preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation** (vs. 20), which he then supports with a quote from Isaiah 52:15.

has been **by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God...to preach the gospel where Christ was not known** (vs. 20), something he has done **from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum** (vs. 19).⁶⁶⁶ It is because he has been focusing on these regions that he has **often been hindered from coming to [Rome]** (vs. 22).

ROMANS 15:23-33—

The final verses of Romans 15 focus on Paul's future travel plans and a request for prayer. He begins by noting that his journey westward is motivated by the fact that the Middle East and Eastern Europe no longer have "new fields" for his apostolic calling and passion—**now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions...I plan...[to] go to Spain** (vv. 23-24). En route he hopes to see **[the Romans] while passing through**, something he has been longing to do **for many years** (vv. 23-24). "In the end trouble at Jerusalem led to his arrest, so that when he got to Rome it was as a prisoner making his appeal to Caesar, something very different from what he envisaged."⁶⁶⁷ He also wants to get their support—**I hope...to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while** (vs. 24).

But first there is an immediate last obligation in Jerusalem—**now...I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia⁶⁶⁸ and Achaia⁶⁶⁹ were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem** (vv. 25-26).⁶⁷⁰ Though **they were pleased to do it** and the collection was a **generous gift, not grudgingly given...not [given] reluctantly or under compulsion** (2 Corinthians 9:5, 7), Paul does note the Gentiles' need to recognize what they have received from the Jews by way of spiritual heritage—**for if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings** (vs. 27). "Gentile Christians, many with no previous ties to Judaism

⁶⁶⁶ **Illyricum** is occupied today by northern Albania, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

⁶⁶⁷ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 517.

⁶⁶⁸ **Macedonia** is modern northern Greece, Macedonia and southern Albania.

⁶⁶⁹ **Achaia** is basically modern Greece.

⁶⁷⁰ Paul collected this money among the largely Gentile churches during his third missionary journey. It was an expression of unity and intimacy.

and living far from Jerusalem, need to understand...their giving of money to the ‘saints in Jerusalem’ will go a long way toward solidifying this sense of ‘indebtedness’.”⁶⁷¹

Romans 15 closes with Paul’s request for prayer—I urge you, brothers and sisters...to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me (vs. 30). He has two specific requests—that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord’s people there (vs. 31).

ROMANS 16:1-2—

Paul begins the final chapter, devoted in large to the naming of specific individuals, with a commendation of **our sister Phoebe, a deacon⁶⁷² of the church in Cenchreae⁶⁷³** (vs. 1). She was apparently a woman of influence and means (**the benefactor⁶⁷⁴ of many** [vs. 2]), who would nonetheless have need upon arriving in Rome, need which Paul asks the church to help with as they **receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of His people** (vs. 2).

ROMANS 16:3-16—

Such a list of names is often under-appreciated by modern readers. But the names hold great significance.⁶⁷⁵ Notes Morris—

- *The multiplicity of greetings to people of whom we know nothing apart from their being listed here roots the letter in a specific context. It was a letter to real people and, as far as we can see, to ordinary people; it was not written to professional theologians. As we consider the weighty matters Paul deals with, we are apt to overlook the fact that it was addressed to people...clearly Paul*

⁶⁷¹ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 905.

⁶⁷² Or **deaconess** (RSV); less likely **servant** (NIV). The word references a local church office holder who ministered primarily in overseeing providing for the physical well-being of congregants; deacons apparently ministered along with the elders in many churches (*cf.* Philippians 1:1). “There has been debate about the exact nature of Phoebe’s role as a ‘deacon of the church in Cenchreae’. Some early church fathers (like Origen) believed that she fulfilled an official role...while we can grant that *diakonos* in Romans does not yet refer to an ecclesiastical office with a set place within the hierarchy of the church and with specific qualifications of the office bearers, yet it does describe a person with a special function in the pastoral and administrative life of the church; and such functions should most probably include pastoral care, teaching, and even missionary work” (Colin Kruse, *op. cit.*, pg. 554).

⁶⁷³ **Cenchreae** was the port of Corinth.

⁶⁷⁴ Or **helper** (RSV); **patron** (ESV).

⁶⁷⁵ Paul mentions twenty-six individuals, two families and three house churches.

*expected this kind of person to be helped by what he wrote...and it is fitting that this letter, which has given us so much solid doctrinal teaching, should end with this emphasis on persons, on love, and on a reminder that humble servants of God perform all sorts of active ministry.*⁶⁷⁶

Note also Moo's comment. "Paul's reference to coworkers reminds us that Paul was not a 'lone ranger' kind of missionary...and Paul's mention of nine women in this list reminds us that women played an important role in the early church...ministry in the early church was never confined to men."⁶⁷⁷

Paul's closing statement—**greet one another with a holy kiss** (vs. 16)—reflects a regular Pauline formula. "Kissing as a form of social respect and regard, at greeting or parting, was widespread throughout the Orient."⁶⁷⁸

ROMANS 16:17-20—

Paul next moves to words of warning—I **urge**⁶⁷⁹ you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. **Keep away from them** (vs. 17). It is a call to be circumspect and vigilant against false teaching and a commendation that they are fully capable of telling the difference.⁶⁸⁰ He reminds them that such teachers are self-serving—for such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites (vs. 18)—and that their method is **smooth talk and flattery...[to] deceive the minds of naïve people**⁶⁸¹ (vs. 18). He then notes that it is good to be "naïve" in some areas—

⁶⁷⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 527.

⁶⁷⁷ Moo, *op. cit.*, pg. 927. Regarding the ministry of the women mentioned, Paul notes that **Junia [was] outstanding among the apostles** (Romans 16:7). This indicates that she was an apostle along with her husband **Andronicus**, something somewhat troubling to many throughout Church history such that the text was apparently later modified to reflect a male name in some manuscripts (*cf.* **Junias** [NIV]). **Outstanding among the apostles** "certainly means 'prominent among the apostles,' rather than 'outstanding in the eyes of the apostles'...the straightforward description 'the apostles', and the following clause, together strongly suggest that Andronicus and Junia belonged to the large group (larger than the twelve) of those appointed apostles by the risen Christ in 1 Cor. 15:7" (James D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 894). "These references to women in Christian ministry reflect the fact that women believers in Jesus were engaged during the earliest days of nascent Christianity in ministries that were just as God-ordained and just as important as the ministries of believing men" (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 1071).

⁶⁷⁸ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 898.

⁶⁷⁹ "*I urge you* is the language of appeal, not of command; Paul is inviting his readers to heed what he says, but he is not giving a peremptory order" (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 539).

⁶⁸⁰ We do not know the nature of the teaching against which Paul's warning is given.

⁶⁸¹ Or **innocent, unsuspecting people; the simple-minded** (NRSV).

innocent about what is evil (vs. 19)—but absolutely not in others—**I want you to be wise about what is good** (vs. 19).

He closes the section by reflecting off Genesis 3:15 and prophesying to the Romans of God's promise to **soon crush Satan under [their] feet** (vs. 20), a prophecy with both immediate and eschatological implications.

ROMANS 16:21-27—

The task of the epistle having been accomplished, Paul sends the Romans greetings from his immediate coworkers—**Timothy...Lucius, Jason...Sosipater...Tertius...Gaius...Erastus...and Quartus** (vv. 21-24) and **Tertius** notes he served as amanuensis—I, **Tertius...wrote down this letter** (vs. 22). He closes with a doxology that summarizes the epistle's basic concerns—**now to Him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to faith and obedience—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen** (vv. 25-27).

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS—

Galatians was written by **Paul**⁶⁸² (Galatians 1:1) to a group of churches in South Galatia.⁶⁸³ “That the letter is addressed to these churches collectively suggests that a certain relationship existed between them, and there were similarities as regards both their external circumstances and their internal conditions.”⁶⁸⁴ It was written largely to address the fact that **some people are throwing you into confusion⁶⁸⁵ and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ** (Galatians 1:7), which included both doctrinal error and casting dispersion on Paul’s apostleship.

- *There are two snares that even the most well-meaning church or teacher can fall into. You can fall into them all by yourself, alone in your room with your Bible. The first snare is this: In order to make God really happy with the way you live as a Christian, you need Christ plus something else (like plus reading the right Bible translation, voting with the correct political party, practicing spiritual disciplines, etc.). These extras are often good, or at least neutral, in themselves...but sometimes these good things can become so much what **our** group is about that these good things eclipse Christ...the second, related, snare has to do with the Holy Spirit. We know God calls us to holiness, but receiving and acting on the Holy Spirit’s guidance sometimes feels murky, uncertain. Beginners, in particular, can’t be cut loose to listen to the Spirit, can they? It might be safer to have a list of good things to do to and a list of bad things not to do.*⁶⁸⁶

The exact identity of these **people** is debated in biblical scholarship, but the longstanding understanding is that they were Judaizers, “Christian Jews who came from the Jerusalem church to Paul’s churches in Galatia with a message stressing the need for

⁶⁸² See footnote #1 above.

⁶⁸³ These were churches founded largely by Paul and would have included churches in Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Galatia was part of modern day Turkey.

⁶⁸⁴ Fung, Ronald, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament—The Epistle To The Galatians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, pg. 3.

⁶⁸⁵ Later Paul will say they were being bewitched (Galatians 3:1).

⁶⁸⁶ McKnight, Scot and Lee-Thorp, Karen, *Galatians: Living in Freedom and Love*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, pp. 11-12.

Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the rudiments of the cultic calendar, both for full acceptance by God and as a proper Christian lifestyle.”⁶⁸⁷

It was likely written on the eve of the Jerusalem Council (*ca.* A.D. 48), possibly by an amanuensis.⁶⁸⁸

GALATIANS 1:1-5—

The epistle begins with many elements common to first century epistolary style—naming the writer, the recipients and giving a greeting.⁶⁸⁹ In identifying himself, **Paul** notes that he is **an apostle—sent not with a human commission nor by human authority, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father** (vs. 1), undoubtedly as noted above because the authenticity of his apostleship was being questioned by the agitators. Both the Father and Jesus stand together in calling him to his apostleship and he speaks with their combined authority, as well as with the same authority as the apostles in Jerusalem. “His aim is to show that his apostolate stands or falls with theirs” (the Jerusalem apostles).⁶⁹⁰ **All the brothers and sisters**⁶⁹¹ with Paul (vs. 2) stand as witnesses to the writing and share his perspective.

His greeting—**grace and peace**⁶⁹² **to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** (vs. 3)—then gives way to an early church confessional statement noting that Christ **gave Himself for our sins** (vs. 4).⁶⁹³ The purpose of His giving of Himself was **to rescue us from the present evil age**⁶⁹⁴ (vs. 4), that is, to transfer us (though we still live in this age) from the realm where sin is irresistible to the realm where Christ is Lord and sin is no longer our master.

⁶⁸⁷ Longenecker, Richard, *Word Biblical Commentary—Galatians*, Word Books, Publisher, Waco, TX, 1990, pg. xciv. “These Judaizers may have been connected with the ‘circumcision party’ of the Jerusalem church whose activities are illustrated in Acts 15:1, 24” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9).

⁶⁸⁸ Though no one is named, this was standard first century practice.

⁶⁸⁹ See Fee, Gordon and Stuart, Douglas, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth—Third Edition*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁹⁰ Cole, R. Alan, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries—Galatians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984 reprint, pg. 32.

⁶⁹¹ We do not know who these individuals were specifically.

⁶⁹² This would be peace with God (justified).

⁶⁹³ This is comparable to **God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement** (Romans 3:25). See also Mark 10:45.

⁶⁹⁴ This **age** is seen by Paul as dominated by an ethically evil power opposed to God’s will; Satan is its god.

- *Here, then, is Paul’s “realized eschatology”. Temporally, the age to come, the resurrection age, still lies in the future; spiritually, believers in Christ have here and now been made partakers of it, because they share the risen life of Christ...they have thus been delivered from the control of the powers which dominate the present age.*⁶⁹⁵

The opening section closes with a doxology, prompted by the confessional statement of Jesus’ atoning work—to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (vs. 5).

GALATIANS 1:6-10—

Conspicuously absent is any thanksgiving for the Galatians. “The most probable account of the omission of any thanksgiving here is that Paul was impelled by a sense of overmastering urgency to come straight to the point.”⁶⁹⁶ Instead, there is an “indignant protest” as he remonstrates—I am astonished⁶⁹⁷ that you are so quickly⁶⁹⁸ deserting⁶⁹⁹ the One who called you by the grace of Christ⁷⁰⁰ and are turning to a different⁷⁰¹ gospel (vs. 6). So as to clarify that by **different** he means “invalid,” Paul quickly notes—which is really no gospel at all (vs. 7). “In Paul’s judgment any ‘gospel’ that differs fundamentally from the one which he preached to the Galatians is no gospel at all, and this verdict he immediately passes on the new doctrine which was claiming the allegiance of his Galatian converts.”⁷⁰² This perversion of **the gospel of Christ**, said to be propagated by **some people**,⁷⁰³ is **throwing [them] into confusion** (vs. 7),⁷⁰⁴ that is, deeply emotionally upsetting them and causing them to wonder if in fact as Gentiles they need to become Jewish to continue in Christ. “Paul understood their insistence on circumcision...to involve a retrogression from justification by grace to justification by

⁶⁹⁵ Bruce, F.F., *New International Greek Testament Commentary—Commentary on Galatians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1982, pg. 76.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 80.

⁶⁹⁷ Or **irritated; amazed** (NASB).

⁶⁹⁸ Or **rashly, easily**.

⁶⁹⁹ The Greek verb (*metatithemi*) was often used of military desertion. Paul is intimating possible apostasy.

⁷⁰⁰ “Paul highlights the means by which the Galatians were first brought to God—i.e., by God’s unmerited benevolence, as contrasted to their ‘works of the law’” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 15).

⁷⁰¹ Or **diametrically opposed**.

⁷⁰² Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 45.

⁷⁰³ It is not likely that these **people** were from among the Galatians themselves.

⁷⁰⁴ “The Greek verb for **throwing into confusion** (*tarasso*) means to ‘shake’ or ‘agitate’” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians—The Bible Speaks Today*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 1986, pg. 23).

law-keeping, a retrogression from the liberty of the Spirit to religious slavery.”⁷⁰⁵ Paul then uses a doubtful but possible condition—**but even if we or an angel from heaven⁷⁰⁶ should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you** (vs. 8)—to drive home the point that the truth of the message trumps the messenger. He then gives one of his most scathing hortatory statements—**let that person be under God’s curse!**⁷⁰⁷ (vs. 8). Paul is so concerned that they “get it” that he repeats himself (vs. 9).

The section closes with two rhetorical questions that indicate part of the agitators’ tact in undermining Paul personally was questioning his motive—**am I now trying to win human approval, or⁷⁰⁸ God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people?** (vs. 10). “His detractors accused him of sacrificing the truth of God for the sake of persuading men...they insinuated that he was more bent on winning favour with men than on securing the approval of God.”⁷⁰⁹ This may have been Paul’s pre-conversion *modus operandi*, but no longer; also, in this case, being a servant of Christ and pleasing people are mutually exclusive—**if I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ** (vs. 10).⁷¹⁰

GALATIANS 1:11-24—

In a section extending through 2:14, Paul emphasizes “afresh that he received his gospel when Christ was revealed to him on the Damascus road...and reviews his early training in Judaism, his persecution of the church, the radical change wrought in him by the revelation...and his immediate obedience to the commission then laid on him.”⁷¹¹ He begins with a reminder that he did not make up his understanding of a “law-free gospel” with no obligations such as circumcision, nor was he instructed such by the other apostles—**I want you to know,⁷¹² brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preach is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it;**

⁷⁰⁵ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 82.

⁷⁰⁶ Most commentators see this as an ironic statement to debunk the alleged credentials of their agitators.

⁷⁰⁷ Or **let him be anathema** (NASB margin), that is, put under a divine ban/banished to hell.

⁷⁰⁸ Or **rather than**.

⁷⁰⁹ Rendall, Frederic, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament—The Epistle to the Galatians*, W. Robertson Nicoll, Editor, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979 reprint, pg. 153.

⁷¹⁰ There are times when these are not mutually exclusive (*cf.* Romans 15:1-3).

⁷¹¹ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 87.

⁷¹² Or “Let me make it perfectly clear” (John MacArthur).

rather, I received it⁷¹³ by revelation⁷¹⁴ from Jesus Christ (vv. 11-12). “The revelation here spoken of obviously refers to Christ’s appearing to Paul on the Damascus road...and it was the gospel of justification by faith which came to Paul as the result of a direct revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁷¹⁵

Paul next gives further explanation, beginning with a reference to his pre-Christian days—**for⁷¹⁶ you have heard of my previous way of life⁷¹⁷ in Judaism, how intensely⁷¹⁸ I persecuted the church of God⁷¹⁹ and tried to destroy it** (vs. 13)—then transitions to commenting on his dedication as a young Pharisee—**I was advancing⁷²⁰ in Judaism beyond many my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers⁷²¹** (vs. 14). But change came, as the all-sufficiency of Christ was revealed to his heart on the Damascus road and he saw the bankruptcy of law—**but [then] God...was pleased to reveal His Son in me⁷²²** (vv. 15-16). Because the agitators claimed Paul was subordinated to and dependent on the Jerusalem apostles (whom they apparently alleged agreed with their understanding), Paul notes his itinerary immediately following Christ’s revelation, an itinerary that did not intersect with the Jerusalem apostles, let alone allow for their instruction of him—**my immediate response was not to consult any human being.⁷²³ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went to Arabia.⁷²⁴ Later I returned to Damascus⁷²⁵** (vv. 16-17).

- *Here Paul is rebutting the account which had evidently won wide circulation, that the Jerusalem leaders instructed him soon after his conversion in the principles of the gospel; (including, it may have been said, the continuing requirement of circumcision), but that he broke loose from their tutelage and*

⁷¹³ Or **it came** (RSV).

⁷¹⁴ For further understanding of how this revelation was communicated and understood, see Fung, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.* pg. 53-54.

⁷¹⁶ The Greek *gar* here is explanatory.

⁷¹⁷ Or **my conduct**.

⁷¹⁸ Or **violently** (NRSV; ESV).

⁷¹⁹ This references the church in Jerusalem.

⁷²⁰ Both morally and spiritually.

⁷²¹ That is the Pharisees’ interpretation of Torah.

⁷²² Or **to me** (NRSV; ESV).

⁷²³ Or **humankind in its finitude and frailty**. This is not a dispersion against the Twelve or James, but a reinforcing that Paul’s understanding came directly from Christ.

⁷²⁴ We do not know if this was for the purpose of evangelism or personal solitude for reflection on implications of Christ’s revelation.

⁷²⁵ His reference to **Arabia...Damascus** is a type of “alibi-reasoning” (Holmberg).

*pursued a line of his own with his circumcision-free gospel—a line which lacked any recognizable authority.*⁷²⁶

Continuing with a consecutive account (**then** [vs. 18]) that shows his “healthy independence” from the Jerusalem apostles, Paul states that **after three years,⁷²⁷ I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted⁷²⁸ with Cephas⁷²⁹ and stayed with him fifteen days⁷³⁰** (vs. 18). He also saw **James, the Lord’s brother⁷³¹** but absolutely **none of the other apostles⁷³²** (vs. 19). Paul is so adamant that the Galatians believe him over his detractors that he calls God as his witness—**I assure you before God⁷³³ that what I am writing you is no lie** (vs. 20).

In the final paragraph of Galatians 1, Paul again continues his itinerary so that there are no suspicious gaps (**then** [vs. 21]). He notes that after Jerusalem he went to **the regions of Syria and Cilicia⁷³⁴** (vs. 21 [NRSV]), stating again that he had no contact with any Jerusalem leaders—**I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea⁷³⁵ that are in Christ** (vs. 22). They only knew him by reputation—**they only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy”** (vs. 23)—to which they responded by praising God (vs. 24). “The response of the Judean Christians, including those at Jerusalem, to his early missionary activities was to give praise to God because of his preaching, which is quite the opposite of the Judaizers’ carping about his authority and message.”⁷³⁶

⁷²⁶ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 95.

⁷²⁷ This is either **three years** after Paul’s conversion or after his return to Damascus.

⁷²⁸ **Or to visit** (NRSV; ESV).

⁷²⁹ Peter’s Aramaic name.

⁷³⁰ **Fifteen days** would not have been ample time for Paul to be dependent on Peter for his apostleship or understanding of the gospel. He did, however, likely learn aspects of Jesus’ earthly life from Peter as they probably discussed “more than the weather” (*cf.* I Corinthians 15:3-7).

⁷³¹ Protestant understanding (known as the “Helvidian” view) is that James was Jesus’ uterine brother, Joseph and Mary being his parents.

⁷³² Scripture is silent as to why Paul did not connect with any of them during his two-week visit.

⁷³³ **Before God** serves also to reiterate He is the Source of Paul’s law-free understanding of the gospel.

⁷³⁴ **Cilicia** today is part of Turkey; its capital was Tarsus.

⁷³⁵ These would be the churches **throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria** (Acts 9:31) that were formed largely as a result of the persecution following Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 8:1).

⁷³⁶ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 42. “What Paul has been saying in verses 13 to 24 may be summarized thus: The fanaticism of his pre-conversion career, the divine initiative in his conversion, and his almost total isolation from the Jerusalem church leaders afterwards together combined to demonstrate that his message was not from man but from God. Further, this historical, circumstantial evidence could not be gainsaid” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 36).

GALATIANS 2:1-10—

Paul concludes the chronological report (**then** [vs. 1]) that he began in Chapter 1 to defend the fact that his understanding of the gospel came directly from Christ and not from the Jerusalem apostles. It is important to Paul that he not omit anything relative to his somewhat detailed apologetic purpose—**after fourteen years,⁷³⁷ I went up again⁷³⁸ to Jerusalem** (vs. 1)—a visit that **this time** included **Barnabas** (vs. 1).⁷³⁹ Paul further notes that he **took Titus along also...who was [not] compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek** (vv. 1, 3), indicating that because the Jerusalem leadership did not demand Titus to be circumcised, they too believed in a law-free gospel. “The non-circumcision of Titus, therefore, was in reality a decision of the principle.”⁷⁴⁰

This second visit was **in response to a revelation⁷⁴¹** (vs. 2); he met **privately with those esteemed as leaders⁷⁴²...set[ting] before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles** (vs. 2) and used the occasion to make sure the Jerusalem leadership was “on board” with him—I **wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain** (vs. 2). “His commission was not derived from Jerusalem, but it could not be executed effectively except in fellowship with Jerusalem.”⁷⁴³ Paul rounds out the first paragraph by again stating why **this [entire] matter arouse** in the first place—**some false believers⁷⁴⁴ had infiltrated⁷⁴⁵ our ranks to spy on the freedom⁷⁴⁶ we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves** (vs. 4). “The aim of the infiltrators is to bring the

⁷³⁷ This is either **fourteen years** after his conversion or after his last visit to Jerusalem.

⁷³⁸ **Again** references the fact this was his second post-conversion visit.

⁷³⁹ This visit was likely in conjunction with either the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) or the famine relief monies he delivered (Acts 11).

⁷⁴⁰ Burton, quoted in Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 93. “To introduce the works of the law and make our acceptance depend on our obedience to rules and regulations was to bring a free man into bondage again. Of this principle Titus was a test case” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 43).

⁷⁴¹ We do not know the specifics of this **revelation** but it clearly establishes that it was God’s direct intervention that prompted the visit.

⁷⁴² **Those esteemed as leaders** are subsequently identified as **James, Cephas and John...esteemed as pillars** (vs. 9). They are also said to be **held in high esteem** (vs. 6).

⁷⁴³ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 111.

⁷⁴⁴ Or **sham-Christians** (NEB).

⁷⁴⁵ Or **had come in to sabotage**.

⁷⁴⁶ **The freedom** references freedom of justification without the law.

Gentile Christians under bondage to the law, of which the act of circumcision is the epitome.”⁷⁴⁷ Thus Paul’s strong response—**we⁷⁴⁸ did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you** (vs. 5).

Vv. 6-10 provide further insight into what resulted from the private meeting with the Jerusalem pillars. Firstly—**they added⁷⁴⁹ nothing to my message** (vs. 6)—meaning that Peter, James and John embraced both the content of Paul’s understanding of the gospel and the fact that the origin of his understanding and his apostolate were supernatural. Secondly, they acknowledged that Paul **had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews⁷⁵⁰** (vs. 7). Thirdly—**those esteemed as pillars gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship⁷⁵¹ when they recognized the grace given to me** (vs. 9). Lastly⁷⁵²—**they asked...that we should continue to remember⁷⁵³ the poor,⁷⁵⁴ the very thing I had been eager to do all along** (vs. 10).

GALATIANS 2:11-14—

The last of Paul’s defense is not in the form of a chronological report to show he was not around the Jerusalem apostles enough to have been indebted to them for his understanding vs. being directly indebted to Christ, but in the form of a “run in” with Peter, a “run in” that he sees as further vindicating of his law-free gospel—**when Cephas came to Antioch,⁷⁵⁵ I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned⁷⁵⁶** (vs. 11). “Augustine seems to have been right in his interpretation of Gal 2:11-14: here is a

⁷⁴⁷ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 94.

⁷⁴⁸ That is, both Paul and all Gentile Christians.

⁷⁴⁹ Or **contributed** (NRSV).

⁷⁵⁰ This does not mean that neither ever “crossed over”; it is rather a generalized statement of their overall ministry callings, “a general recognition of the dispensation of God which had so far prevailed and a general agreement giving the primary direction in which each side was to apply its respective missionary efforts” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 100).

⁷⁵¹ Or **shook hands with me and Barnabas** (The Message).

⁷⁵² This final element lies outside the scope of the argument at hand.

⁷⁵³ “The verb ‘to remember,’ in Greek as well as in English, means not just ‘to bring a gift,’ but more basically ‘to keep someone in mind as worthy of affection or recognition’” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 60).

⁷⁵⁴ **The poor** references the economically poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (*cf.* Romans 15:26).

⁷⁵⁵ There is no consensus among scholars as to when this event transpired, but the majority place it after Paul’s visit to Jerusalem recorded in Galatians 2:1-10.

⁷⁵⁶ Or **he was clearly in the wrong** (NEB); **he stood self-condemned** (NRSV). Later Paul will say he was **not acting in line with the truth of the gospel** (vs. 14).

case of the higher claims of truth over rank or office, and Peter was dreadfully wrong and Paul right in his rebuke and his defense of the gospel.”⁷⁵⁷ “It is not an honest mistake that stirs Paul’s wrath so much as the deceitfulness of it all”⁷⁵⁸ in that Peter gave in to pressure—for **before certain people came from James,⁷⁵⁹ he used to eat⁷⁶⁰ with the Gentiles. But when they arrived,⁷⁶¹ he began to draw back and separate himself⁷⁶² from the Gentiles because he was afraid ⁷⁶³ of those who belonged to the circumcision group⁷⁶⁴** (vs. 12). It is also important to Paul that we note the impact of Peter’s example on others—the **other Jews⁷⁶⁵ joined him in his hypocrisy,⁷⁶⁶ so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray** (vs. 13).

Exactly what did Paul’s opposing Peter to his face entail? **I said to Cephas in front of them all,⁷⁶⁷ “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How⁷⁶⁸ is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”** (vs. 14). “Cephas had not abandoned a nonlegal lifestyle on any permanent basis, but only temporarily as a matter of expediency...and had inadvertently destroyed the integrity of Gentile Christians...for they would have had to become Jews for full acceptance within the church.”⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁵⁷ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 79.

⁷⁵⁸ Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 74.

⁷⁵⁹ These would have been messengers from the Jerusalem church, not Judaizers.

⁷⁶⁰ **To eat** would have included partaking of the Eucharist.

⁷⁶¹ “What was their message? It may have been something like this: ‘news is reaching us in Jerusalem that you are habitually practicing table-fellowship with Gentiles. This is causing grave scandal to our more conservative brethren here. Not only so: it is becoming common knowledge outside the church, so that our attempts to evangelize our fellow-Jews are being seriously hampered’” (T. W. Manson, quoted in Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 130).

⁷⁶² The Greek construction of these two verbs indicates this was a gradual withdrawing.

⁷⁶³ Though we are not told why, **because he was afraid** suggests a strong emotional reaction.

⁷⁶⁴ **The circumcision group** would have included Jewish-Christians and non-Christians.

⁷⁶⁵ These would have been Jewish Christians in Antioch.

⁷⁶⁶ Or **play-acting based on expediency and not principle**. Paul knew this was not Peter’s true conviction. “In Jewish usage, the Greek word *hypocrites* didn’t just mean being insincere or fake. It carried the sense of ‘wickedness, opposition to God and his truth, and even heresy.’ That is, even Peter was behaving at times according to a false gospel (2:14)” (Scot McKnight & Karen Lee-Thorp, *op. cit.*, pg. 28).

⁷⁶⁷ **In front of them all** references a public rebuke in front of all the members of the Antioch church during an open session.

⁷⁶⁸ **How** “expresses all of the emotions of surprise, displeasure, and agitation” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 78).

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

GALATIANS 2: 15-21⁷⁷⁰—

Paul’s argument (or continued quote) begins by stating what he assumes Peter knows and affirms relative to justification⁷⁷¹—**we who are Jews⁷⁷² by birth⁷⁷³ and not sinful Gentiles,⁷⁷⁴ know that a person is not justified⁷⁷⁵ by observing the law,⁷⁷⁶ but by faith in Jesus Christ** (vv. 15-16).⁷⁷⁷ As a result (so [vs. 16])—**we, too,⁷⁷⁸ have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified** (vs. 16). “Paul denied any saving significance to the law.”⁷⁷⁹

- *The upshot of Paul’s statement in vv. 15f is that justification is attained by faith in Christ alone and not by legal works, and that this principle—which is illustrated in his own experience and that of the other Jewish Christians and, at least in what it denies, is supported by Scripture—applies universally to Jew and Gentile alike.*⁷⁸⁰

Paul then moves to address apparent charges against him, but the exact nature of those charges is not clear to us—**but if,⁷⁸¹ in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners,⁷⁸² doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin?**⁷⁸³ (vs. 17).

- *Here Paul may simply mean that when law-abiding Jews like Peter and himself cease to look to the law as the basis of their justification before God and find that justification in Christ instead, they put themselves effectively on*

⁷⁷⁰ Scholars are divided as to where Paul’s quote to Peter ends. The TNIV quotes him through vs. 21. The NRSV confines it to only vs. 14, with vv. 15-21 a doctrinal argument.

⁷⁷¹ See Acts 15:7-11.

⁷⁷² That is Christ-following Jews.

⁷⁷³ Or **natural descent**.

⁷⁷⁴ **Sinful Gentiles** references the Jews’ perspective that because the Gentiles did not possess the law there was no possibility of their attaining righteousness through it.

⁷⁷⁵ That is declared legally (forensically) righteous before God.

⁷⁷⁶ Or **a person is justified not by the works of the law** (NRSV).

⁷⁷⁷ “These verses have been aptly described as ‘Paul’s doctrine of justification in a nutshell’” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 112).

⁷⁷⁸ Like believing Gentiles.

⁷⁷⁹ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 140.

⁷⁸⁰ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 118.

⁷⁸¹ Or **since**.

⁷⁸² Or **we no less than the Gentiles have accepted the position of sinners** (NEB margin).

⁷⁸³ Or **is Christ then a servant of sin?** (NRSV; ESV). “To the Jews Paul’s gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ would remove all incentive for moral effort. In their eyes it would lead to a lower moral standard than under the law of Moses. Therefore, even Christ would have become” One who promotes sin (R. Alan Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 80).

*a level with “sinners of the Gentiles”: they have, in that sense, “been found sinners”—they themselves as much as lesser breeds without the law...they have in logic, if not in consciousness, abandoned faith in the law, and have had to take their place as sinners, utterly in need of God’s justifying grace.*⁷⁸⁴

The thought of Christ promoting sin is so preposterous that Paul responds—**Absolutely not!** (vs. 18)⁷⁸⁵—and goes on to state—**if I⁷⁸⁶ rebuild what I destroyed,⁷⁸⁷ then I really would be a lawbreaker⁷⁸⁸** (vs. 18).⁷⁸⁹ “Paul insists that to revert to the Mosaic law as a Christian is what really constitutes breaking the law, for then the law’s true intent is nullified.”⁷⁹⁰

The closing paragraph begins with a statement that Paul assumes would be affirmed by all Christ-followers—**through the law⁷⁹¹ I⁷⁹² died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ⁷⁹³ and I no longer live,⁷⁹⁴ but Christ lives in me** (vv. 19-20).

- *In many ways, this is one of the central passages of Galatians. It is, indeed, a text frequently used by preachers, but it is important to realize that it is not so much an exhortation to personal sanctification as a powerful argument for the total sufficiency and efficacy of the work of Christ. It is true that it deals with the great motives for Christian service, but the central thought is the complete breach with the old ways of thought that is demanded by faith-committal to Christ. The “faith that justifies” is total, in extent if not in quantity.*⁷⁹⁵

The chapter concludes with a climax in the argument as Paul answers what was undoubtedly an objection to his understanding of a law-free gospel—**I do not set aside**

⁷⁸⁴ Bruce, *Galatians*, pp. 140-141. “Paul specifically denies the allegation that he was guilty of making Christ the agent or author of men’s sins. On the contrary, he goes on ‘I make myself a transgressor’ (vs. 18 [KJV]). In other words, ‘if after my justification I am still a sinner, it is my fault and not Christ’s. I have only myself to blame; no-one can blame Christ’” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65).

⁷⁸⁵ Or **perish the thought!**

⁷⁸⁶ **I** here is rhetorical to make his point more diplomatically.

⁷⁸⁷ **What I destroyed** references Paul’s understanding at his conversion that the law is not the basis of justification.

⁷⁸⁸ Or **one who sets aside the law’s intent.**

⁷⁸⁹ Paul is apparently intimating that Peter and those who joined him in not continuing to eat with the Gentiles were in fact doing this.

⁷⁹⁰ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 91. The law’s true intent is to define sin and to show us our need for redemption in Christ.

⁷⁹¹ **Through the law** means “that it was the intention of the Mosaic law to bring us to a place of being no longer dependent on its jurisdiction for the living of our lives” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 91).

⁷⁹² **I** is representative.

⁷⁹³ Or **I am in Christ** (justified) and I share in His death to sin and the law and in His resurrection life.

⁷⁹⁴ Or **I no longer live an independent life of my own.**

⁷⁹⁵ Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 82.

the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing (vs. 21). “He is answering an objection that he makes the grace of God null and void, the more specific reference being to his setting aside the law and its righteousness, in which (according to the Jewish viewpoint) the grace of God consisted.”⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁶ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 125.

GALATIANS 3:1-6—

Paul begins here a section of the epistle that continues through 4:11 that is built around two sets of somewhat rebuking rhetorical questions (3:1-5 and 4:8-10). “With the background clarified by the recital of the most relevant elements of his case, Paul could now at last begin to address the Galatian crisis directly, and thus to embark on the main section of his exposition.”⁷⁹⁷ Five rhetorical questions form the framework of Paul’s diatribe in vv. 1-5.

Before his first question, Paul writes a biting and rather insulting statement that “cashes in on his relational equity”—**you foolish Galatians!** (vs. 1). It is not an indictment of stupidity but an expression of surprise that they apparently lack comprehension⁷⁹⁸ in that they have allowed themselves to be hoodwinked—**who has bewitched**⁷⁹⁹ **you?** (vs. 1).⁸⁰⁰ This astounds Paul because **before [their] very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified** (vs. 1), meaning, “the public and official character of the apostolic kerygma [was] set forth, like a placard for all to see.”⁸⁰¹ So how could they abandon it?

Paul’s second question appeals to their personal experience with Christ when saved—**did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?** (vs. 2).⁸⁰² He is throwing the argument back on them by in effect asking, “You know how

⁷⁹⁷ Dunn, James D.G., *Black’s New Testament Commentary—The Epistle To The Galatians*—Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2002 printing, pg. 150. “Paul is concerned to argue, from a scriptural and theological perspective, the superiority of the gospel doctrine of faith to the Galatian agitators’ law-oriented version of Christianity. In seeking to press home his central thesis with arguments from various directions which ‘tumble over one another,’ Paul appeals first to the readers’ experience and then to Scripture, and in connection with both to logical reasoning” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 128).

⁷⁹⁸ Or **are being illogical**.

⁷⁹⁹ Or **fascinated/hypnotized**. “Their new behaviour was so strange, so completely at odds with the liberating message which they had previously accepted, that it appeared as if someone had put a spell on them” (F. F. Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 148).

⁸⁰⁰ This is Paul’s first rhetorical question.

⁸⁰¹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 129.

⁸⁰² The intended obvious answer is, “**By believing what you heard**”—a synonym for by grace through faith.

you started with Christ (were justified), so why would you think that continuing with Him (sanctification) would be by a different means?”

His third question⁸⁰³ plays off the second—**after beginning with the Spirit,**⁸⁰⁴ **are you now trying to finish by human effort?**⁸⁰⁵ (vs. 4). This indicates that the Judaizers’ erroneous teaching was in the area of sanctification more than justification.⁸⁰⁶ “Paul’s missionary efforts were taken as merely the first step, and the opponents claimed to provide the necessary and final measures to bring salvation to completion and perfection.”⁸⁰⁷

The fourth question appeals to experiences they have had with the Spirit since believing, experiences totally independent of any encroachment of law—**have you experienced so much**⁸⁰⁸ **in vain**⁸⁰⁹—**if**⁸¹⁰ **it really was in vain?** (vs. 4). “If the Galatians slip back into the twilight of a half-Jewish faith, it will mean not only the end of all such manifestations of the Spirit; it will mean that they might as well never have had the experience for all the good that it did them.”⁸¹¹

The last question reflects off their ongoing experience with the Spirit—**does God give you His Spirit**⁸¹² **and work miracles among you by your observing the law, or by your believing what you heard?** (vs. 5).⁸¹³ This also serves as a summation, taking up the idea first posed in vs. 2. “For Paul, the antithesis between law and Spirit was as absolute as the antithesis between works and faith...the presence of the Spirit displaces

⁸⁰³ This question is prefaced by another comment that expresses Paul’s astonishment at their lack of maturity—**are you so foolish?** (vs. 3).

⁸⁰⁴ **The Spirit** is powerful and enabling.

⁸⁰⁵ **Human effort** is self-centered and self-indulgent with no access to the Spirit’s transformational power.

⁸⁰⁶ “Many people today believe the debate in Galatians is primarily about how you get saved, because Martin Luther focused on that important question five hundred years ago. But for Paul and the Judaizers, how you get saved isn’t their main point of disagreement. It’s what you do once you are saved. If Christ and the Holy Spirit were enough to bring you to salvation, are they enough for you to live the rest of your life in God’s grace?” (McKnight and Lee-Thorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14).

⁸⁰⁷ Betz, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 106. “The insistence on circumcision was doubly wrong in Paul’s eyes: it re-erected an ethnic barrier which limited the grace of God; and it left those who lived by such emphases caught in all the weaknesses of the flesh” (James D. G. Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 156).

⁸⁰⁸ **So much** is nebulous but in general terms references ongoing experience with the Spirit in their individual and corporate lives, including manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12).

⁸⁰⁹ **Or to no avail; in futility.**

⁸¹⁰ The Greek construction (*ei*) indicates that the situation is not irretrievable.

⁸¹¹ Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 91.

⁸¹² **Or justify you.**

⁸¹³ As in vs. 2 the intended answer is, “**By your believing what you heard**” and is again a synonym for by grace through faith.

the law and rules out of court every attempt to achieve righteousness by works which the law prescribes.”⁸¹⁴

Paul concludes the argument by citing Genesis 15:6—**Abraham “believed God,⁸¹⁵ and it was credited to him as righteousness”**—to show that it was by the hearing of faith and not legal works that Abraham was justified; as a prototype of the human response God seeks, it establishes that His way has been and always will be by grace through faith (for both justification and sanctification).

GALATIANS 3:7-14—

Then⁸¹⁶ (vs. 7) indicates that Paul is transitioning to explain what is inferred in vv. 1-6.

- *From the personal question, “How did you Galatians gain your acceptance with God?” (3:1-6), Paul passes on to the more general question, “Who are the people whom God accepts and on what basis are they accepted?”...it appears that the judaizing opponents had argued...that in order to share in the blessings promised in God’s covenant with Abraham, it was necessary to become a child of Abraham—which meant circumcision and observance of the law.⁸¹⁷*

Paul’s first point is—**understand⁸¹⁸ that those who have faith are children of Abraham** (vs. 7). This clearly establishes that Abraham’s true descendents are spiritual, regardless of ethnicity and most certainly regardless of circumcision. What characterizes Abraham’s true descendents is **faith⁸¹⁹**...even as faith characterized him, **the man of faith** (vs. 9). Because justification by faith is God’s way, Gentiles have hope of justification. As a matter of fact—**scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by⁸²⁰ faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you”⁸²¹** (vs. 8). The doctrine of justification by faith (here termed **the gospel**) was implicitly involved and anticipated in the promise to Abraham.

⁸¹⁴ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pg. 152.

⁸¹⁵ “Abraham entered into his particular blessing by realizing that he could do nothing himself, confessing it to God, and throwing himself on God, counting on God to do what he could not” (R. Alan Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 91).

⁸¹⁶ Greek, *ara*.

⁸¹⁷ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 137.

⁸¹⁸ Or **recognize**.

⁸¹⁹ This is reiterated in vs. 9—**those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham**.

⁸²⁰ Or **on the grounds of/through**.

⁸²¹ This is a conflation of Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 22:18.

- *We may reconstruct Paul’s reasoning in v. 8 as follows: Abraham received righteousness by faith (v. 6); his believing response was the occasion of the establishment of the principle of justification by faith; God foresaw that he was to justify the Gentiles according to this principle; this principle was announced as the timeless principle of the gospel...when God...made the promise to Abraham that through him all the nations (that is, the Gentiles) would be blessed.*⁸²²

Let me further explain,⁸²³ Paul states. Is justification by the law even possible? Short answer, “No”; it is quite the contrary—**all who rely on observing the law⁸²⁴ are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law”⁸²⁵** (vs. 10). “Paul’s opening claim was exactly the opposite from what it should have been”⁸²⁶ in Jewish thinking. **Those who rely on observing the law** are said to be **under a curse**,⁸²⁷ as opposed to being under a blessing as the Judaizers claimed the Gentiles would be should they adopt law-based sanctification, because to approach God on the grounds of one’s own merit *ipso facto* means failure and its subsequent consequences (**curse**). Paul then cites Habakkuk 2:4 to confirm the principle of justification by grace through faith stating—**clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because “the righteous will live by faith”** (vs. 11). “Paul’s argument in v. 11 is, then, to this effect: because Scripture says that it is he who is righteous (that is, justified) *by faith* that will live, it follows that no one is justified by works of the law (irrespective of one’s success or failure in keeping it).”⁸²⁸

By way of an adversative particle,⁸²⁹ vs. 12 states that law and faith are mutually exclusive, again emphasizing that justification can never be attained by means of the law—**the law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “Whoever does these things will live by them”⁸³⁰** (vs. 12). “The law was given in salvation history to uncover

⁸²² Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 140.

⁸²³ This is the sense of the Greek *gar* that begins vs. 10. It is left untranslated by the TNIV; **for** (NRSV).

⁸²⁴ Or **all who hold to legal works for justification and for the guiding principle in life.**

⁸²⁵ **The Book of the Law** references the written Torah in all its details. This is Paul’s free translation of Deuteronomy 27:26.

⁸²⁶ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 171.

⁸²⁷ **Under a curse** is a generalized statement meaning, “Under appropriate consequences for failure to attain justification.”

⁸²⁸ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 145.

⁸²⁹ Greek, *de* (**for** [NRSV; ESV]). This is left untranslated in the TNIV.

⁸³⁰ Leviticus 18:5.

sin, at times even by rousing it to action, and so functions for another purpose and on a different level than faith; furthermore, the law has no power to make alive.”⁸³¹ The only way humankind can experience life and justification is through Christ who **redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us**,⁸³² for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”⁸³³ **He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit** (vv. 13-14). “Paul stresses, against the Judaizers, that acceptance by God as signaled in receiving God’s Spirit depends entirely on faith apart from any merit-amassing attitude toward the Jewish law.”⁸³⁴

GALATIANS 3:15-18—

By way of **an example from everyday life** (vs. 15) that is drawn from judicial practice, Paul argues that “if his readers...persist in appealing to the law, let them consider that the divine promise was embodied in a settlement which was made long before the giving of the law and which therefore cannot be annulled or even modified by the law.”⁸³⁵ The presented judicial evidence and the subsequent theological implication? **Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant**⁸³⁶ **that has been duly established, so it is in this case...the law, introduced 430 years later**,⁸³⁷ **does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promises**⁸³⁸ (vv. 15, 17). “The point of the parallel is that a human will, once signed and witnessed, could not be set aside in favour of some other document claiming to represent the mind of the testator but lacking ratification, and could not be added to by some other and subsequent authority,”⁸³⁹ a point Paul reiterates in vs. 18—**for if the inheritance depends on the**

⁸³¹ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 120.

⁸³² Paul here presents Christ as “an exchange curse,” “to show how Christ’s bearing of mankind’s curse nullifies all thoughts of legalism and to set up his conclusion regarding the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit in v 14” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 123).

⁸³³ Deuteronomy 21:23.

⁸³⁴ Longenecker, *loc. cit.*

⁸³⁵ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 169.

⁸³⁶ **Or a person’s will** (NRSV).

⁸³⁷ See Exodus 12:40.

⁸³⁸ See Genesis 12:3 and 18:18. “Neither the law (covenant!) at Sinai, nor the specific command to Abraham concerning circumcision as the necessary sign of the covenant, changed or set aside the wording of the original promise” (James D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 185).

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 182.

law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

So important is it to Paul to tie the promise into Christ that he states—**the promises**⁸⁴⁰ were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ (vs. 16). Though aware that **many people** are involved in receiving and carrying out the promise, Paul’s concern is to link Christ to Isaac, the child of promise through whom would come Messiah.

- *Paul’s experiential, biblical, and theological arguments in 3:1-18...are directed against all attempts to use the Mosaic law as a means to gain acceptance before God, i.e., “legalism.” The Judaizers of Galatia themselves might have claimed that this was not the thrust of their endeavors; that all they wanted was for Gentile Christians to supplement their faith in Christ with Torah observance, just as God directed Abraham to do and so to experience a more perfect Christian life. For Paul, however, any mingling of faith and law, even if it is claimed that this has only to do with a proper lifestyle and not justification, is a discrediting of the Abrahamic covenant, the work of Christ, the ministry of the Spirit, and the principle of faith, and so brings one right back to the issue of legalism.*⁸⁴¹

GALATIANS 3:19-25—

Then⁸⁴² (vs. 19) indicates a transition as Paul addresses an implied (or actualized) concern that he is teaching that the law had no purpose—**what was the purpose of the law?** (vs. 19). He must show its purpose in salvation history, as well as its limitations.⁸⁴³ He begins with a five-point answer—

1. **It was added** (vs. 19), meaning that it was subsequent to the promise; “the law was not of the essence of God’s redemptive activity with humankind”⁸⁴⁴; the promise was.
2. **It was added because of**⁸⁴⁵ **transgression** (vs. 19). The law was never intended as a means of bringing about righteousness but of bringing about a knowledge of

⁸⁴⁰ By **promises** Paul means **the promise** repeated several times.

⁸⁴¹ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

⁸⁴² Greek, *oun*.

⁸⁴³ See also Romans 7.

⁸⁴⁴ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 138.

what righteousness entails; of defining sin (**through the law we become conscious of our sin** [Romans 3:20]).

3. **It was added...until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come** (vs. 19). According to Paul, the law was intended to be in effect for God's people only until Christ came. "The covenant of promise is presented to the mind as of permanent validity, both beginning before and continuing through the period of the law and afterwards, the law on the other hand as temporary, added to the permanent covenant for a period limited in both directions."⁸⁴⁶
4. **The law was given through angels** (vs. 19). Longstanding rabbinic understanding, reflected in the LXX translation of Deuteronomy 33:2,⁸⁴⁷ was that angels were involved in the giving of the law. In Paul's argument, this depreciates the law to some degree in that it did not come directly from God, as did the promise.
5. **The law was...entrusted to a mediator** (vs. 19). The **mediator** is clearly Moses; in and of itself, this seems to be saying nothing more than the statement on angels says, namely, that the law did not come as directly from God to humankind as the promise did. However, vs. 20—**a mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one**—indicates that Paul is inferring disparagement. Though a difficult verse,⁸⁴⁸ vs. 20 likely means that "God does not need an intermediary. In other words, there is here a further contrast between the law, given through intermediaries (angels and Moses), and, once again, the promise, given *directly* to Abraham 'by God' himself."⁸⁴⁹

"Thus far, in his answer to the question regarding the purpose of the law Paul has pointed to its negative function, its limited validity, its mediated communication, and its conditional nature—all of which show, by implication if not by explicit statement, that

⁸⁴⁵ Or **for the sake of defining** (NASB margin).

⁸⁴⁶ Burton, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 139.

⁸⁴⁷ **The Lord came from Sinai...with myriads of holy ones** (TNIV); **the Lord came from Sinai...and angels from His right hand were with Him** (LXX).

⁸⁴⁸ "Of v. 20 it has been said that there are as many interpretations as the number of years between promise and law!" (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 161).

⁸⁴⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 191.

the later dispensation of law is inferior to the original covenant of promise.”⁸⁵⁰ But this does not mean that the law contradicts the promise. Hence—**is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not!** (vs. 21). When the purpose of the law is rightly understood, we see that “the role of the law is consistent with, integrated into, that of the promise.”⁸⁵¹ Paul reminds us of the law’s purpose from a negative and positive perspective. Firstly, the negative function—**if⁸⁵² a law had been given that could impart life,⁸⁵³ then righteousness would certainly have come by the law** (vs. 21). Secondly, the contrasting positive function—**but Scripture⁸⁵⁴ has locked up⁸⁵⁵ everything⁸⁵⁶ under the control of sin,⁸⁵⁷ so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ,⁸⁵⁸ might be given to those who believe⁸⁵⁹** (vs. 22).

- *Before Christian faith had entered the scene, we were held under arrest by law, kept in goal, awaiting the divine revelation of that faith that was to come. Seen in this light, the law was our “escort” to lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by trust. But once faith has come we are no longer under the authority of our “escort”; for we are all God’s sons, through trust in Christ Jesus.*⁸⁶⁰

Paul ends this section by emphasizing the law’s supervisory function (vv. 23-25); first, however, he repeats the sense of vs. 22—**before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law,⁸⁶¹ locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed** (vs. 23)—putting the law functionally in the place of sin. “To be ‘under law’ is in practice to be ‘under sin’—not because law and sin are identical, but because law, while forbidding sin, stimulates the very thing that it forbids...sin therefore has dominion

⁸⁵⁰ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 162.

⁸⁵¹ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 192.

⁸⁵² This is technically known as a “contrary-to-fact condition” in the original Greek, meaning the intended answer is, “Such is not possible...that is...no such law could have been given because law cannot do this.”

⁸⁵³ **Life** is contextually synonymous with **righteousness**...both being synonymous with justification. Only God can justify.

⁸⁵⁴ We do not know Paul’s exact reference; it may even be a metonymy for God Himself.

⁸⁵⁵ Or **imprisoned** (NRSV).

⁸⁵⁶ Or **all** (NKJV); **the whole world** (NIV).

⁸⁵⁷ See Romans 3:9.

⁸⁵⁸ Or **through faith in the gospel**.

⁸⁵⁹ Or **so that faith in Jesus Christ may be the ground on which the promised blessing is given, and given to those who have such faith** (NEB).

⁸⁶⁰ Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 107.

⁸⁶¹ See Romans 6:14.

over people so long as they are ‘under law’.”⁸⁶² As to the law’s supervisory function—**the law was put in charge of us⁸⁶³ until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law** (vv. 24-25). Key to understanding Paul’s reference to the law’s supervisory function is understanding what is meant by **put in charge...under the supervision of.**⁸⁶⁴ Note Bruce—

- *The paidagogos was the personal slave-attendant who accompanied the free-born boy wherever he went, from the time he left his nurse’s care. It was his duty to teach the boy good manners (with the use of the birch, if necessary), take him to school...wait for him there...then take him home and test his memory by making him recite the lesson he had learned. During the boy’s minority the paidagogos imposed a necessary restraint on his liberty until, with his coming of age, he could be trusted to use his liberty responsibly. Paul does not suppose that the presence of this paidagogos will protect his charge from doing wrong⁸⁶⁵*

Paul sees the law in a similar vein.

- *The law too, Paul is saying, was designed to teach us the great truth that only through faith in Christ could we be justified, although its part in this process was negative, not positive. So far from the law being contradictory to “the promise,” or even irrelevant, Paul has shown that the law is indispensable. But, like the child’s escort, it has its definite place in history. Once the faith-principle is operative, there is no room for that of law. The two cannot co-exist at the same time (as the Judaizers think) since the function of law is essentially preparatory.⁸⁶⁶*

GALATIANS 3:26-29—

Paul begins the final paragraph of chapter 3 by explaining vs. 25; it shows why believers **are no longer under the supervision of the law** (vs. 25), namely—**in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith** (vs. 26). Just as the *paidagogos* was no longer needed when the boy came of age, so the law is no longer needed for **children**

⁸⁶² Bruce, *Galatians*, pp. 181-182.

⁸⁶³ Or **the law was our disciplinarian** (NRSV); **the law was our custodian** (RSV); **the law was our guardian** (ESV).

⁸⁶⁴ Greek, *paidagogos*.

⁸⁶⁵ Bruce, *Galatians*, pp. 182-183.

⁸⁶⁶ Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 108. “No longer could it be argued that circumcision, Jewish dietary laws, following distinctly Jewish ethical precepts, or any other matter having to do with a Jewish lifestyle were requisite for the life of faith” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 149).

of God. And what was the time of their becoming **children of God through faith**? It was at their water baptism into Christ, an action that Paul saw as “the normal but not necessary, the helpful but not indispensable sign and seal put upon the act of faith appropriating the gift of God in Christ.”⁸⁶⁷ So as to level the playing field between Jew and Gentile,⁸⁶⁸ Paul reminds us that water baptism makes **all [believers] one in Christ Jesus**, a unity that does away with racial, social and gender distinctions in the body of Christ—**there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female** (vs. 28).⁸⁶⁹ He concludes by noting that relationship with Christ, not observing the Torah, relates Gentile Christians directly to Abraham and hence to God’s promise to him—**if⁸⁷⁰ you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise** (vs. 29).

⁸⁶⁷ Scott, quoted in Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 174.

⁸⁶⁸ See also Romans 3-4.

⁸⁶⁹ “The three antitheses, which represent the most far-reaching distinctions of ancient society, seem to have been deliberately chosen with an eye to the threefold privilege for which a pious male Jew daily thanked God: that he was not made a Gentile, a slave, or a woman—categories of people debarred from certain religious privileges” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 175).

⁸⁷⁰ Or **since**.

GALATIANS 4:1-7—

What I am saying is⁸⁷¹ (vs. 1) begins Paul’s further elaboration of Galatians 3:23-25. He begins by stating—**as long as heirs are underage they are no different from slaves, although they own the whole estate** (vs. 1). In other words, neither is able to enjoy the inheritance, howbeit for vastly different reasons. **So also,**⁸⁷² **when we**⁸⁷³ **were underage,**⁸⁷⁴ **we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world**⁸⁷⁵ (vs. 3). Though the idea behind **elemental spiritual forces of the world** is debated and complex (see Excursus below), here “we may note that the servitude to the *elemental spiritual forces* is described in v. 5 as subjection to law, so that certainly what Paul has primarily in view here is the law, and that as an instrument of spiritual bondage.”⁸⁷⁶ “The situation envisaged, of course, is an ironic reversal of the claim made in iii.28: ‘in Christ’ means an equality of *liberty* for slave and free; ‘under the law’ means an equality of *restriction* for slave and heir under age.”⁸⁷⁷

In contrast, salvation has radically changed things for Christ-followers—**but when the set time had fully come,**⁸⁷⁸ **God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law,**⁸⁷⁹ **that we might receive adoption to sonship**⁸⁸⁰ (vv. 4-

⁸⁷¹ Or “**My point is this**” (Dunn); “**Let me put it this way**” (Bruce).

⁸⁷² Paul here begins application of his analogy.

⁸⁷³ **We** here is inclusive of all Christians.

⁸⁷⁴ Outside of a relationship with Christ. “Adults know there are good reasons for placing limits on what underage people can do. Adults also know that adulthood brings responsibilities as well as privileges. Still, most adults are glad that the time of being looked after and constantly corrected is past. This is the sense of relief and freedom Paul feels when he thinks about being one of God’s adult children. He has a Father to whom he continues to call out, ‘Abba!’ with affection and respect. But he’s not a child with a nanny; he’s an adult son and heir” (Scot McKnight & Karen Lee-Thorp, *op. cit.*, pg. 45).

⁸⁷⁵ Or **elemental spirits of the universe** (RSV); **elementary principles of the world** (ESV); **basic principles of the world** (NIV).

⁸⁷⁶ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 181. “The law regarded in the way it typically was within contemporary Judaism, the law being treated as it was by the other missionaries and the judaizing Gentile converts, was functioning in effect as one of those cosmic forces which were then popularly thought to control and dominate life. Life under such a power was a life dominated by fear of infringing its taboos and boundaries” (James D. G. Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 226).

⁸⁷⁷ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 210.

⁸⁷⁸ That is, Christ’s appearance marked a change in ages.

⁸⁷⁹ **To redeem those under the law** states God’s purpose in sending His Son.

⁸⁸⁰ **That we might receive adoption to sonship** states the purpose of being redeemed from the law.

5). “Christ achieved the purpose of redeeming those under law by bearing the full obligation of the law in life as well as the curse of the law in death.”⁸⁸¹ This sonship is marked by 1) the presence of **the Spirit of His Son [in] our hearts**; 2) **the Spirit [calling] out, “Abba,⁸⁸² Father”**; and 3) Christ-followers being **no longer slaves, but God’s children...and heirs** (vv. 6-7). “Instead of being imprisoned under law (or enslaved to the *elemental spiritual forces of the world*), instead of being under the control of a slave-attendant or in care of guardians or stewards, believers are now full-grown children of God; they have been given their freedom and the power to use it responsibly.”⁸⁸³

GALATIANS 4:8-11—

These verses close a section begun at Galatians 3:1.⁸⁸⁴

- *Having argued from 1) the Galatians’ own experience, 2) the example of Abraham, 3) crucial biblical portions, and 4) traditional confessions and statements drawn from the proclamation of the early church, Paul concludes his rebuke section of Galatians (1:6-4:11) with an expression of concern for his Galatian converts. Matters were at a crisis point in his converts’ spiritual experience, and Paul fears for their welfare and for the effectiveness of his ministry among them. With his arguments concluded, Paul now turns to the request section of his letter (4:12-6:10).*⁸⁸⁵

Paul begins by reminding the Galatians of their pre-conversion state, including its bondage to demonic forces—**formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods**⁸⁸⁶ (vs. 8). Knowing what they know and having come to **know God...how is it**⁸⁸⁷ **that you are turning back**⁸⁸⁸ **to those weak and miserable forces?**⁸⁸⁹ **Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?...I fear**⁸⁹⁰

⁸⁸¹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 182.

⁸⁸² *Abba* is an Aramaic term of intimacy “given its particular resonance by Jesus himself (Mark 14:36) and implied [in it] is the same sort of intimacy as Jesus’ own use of the word indicates” (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, pg. 461).

⁸⁸³ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 200.

⁸⁸⁴ Some commentators see it extending back to Galatians 1:6.

⁸⁸⁵ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 183.

⁸⁸⁶ Elsewhere referred to as **so-called gods** (1 Corinthians 8:5); **demons** (1 Corinthians 10:20); **mute idols** (1 Corinthians 12:2).

⁸⁸⁷ **Or how is it possible?**

⁸⁸⁸ **Turning back** connotes being on the path to apostasy.

⁸⁸⁹ **Or weak and beggarly elemental spirits** (NRSV). See on Galatians 4:3 above and Excursus below.

⁸⁹⁰ The Greek verb tense (present) indicates that Paul saw the final result as yet to be determined.

for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you (vv. 9, 11). “The *weak and miserable forces* are powerless; they cannot reassert their authority over them unless these deliberately put themselves back under their power. That any should be so foolish as to do so Paul finds scarcely credible; yet this is what he feared some of his Galatian friends were actually in process of doing.”⁸⁹¹ The specific form of their enslavement mentioned was **observing special days and months and seasons and years!** (vs. 10), a generic statement referencing their observation of sacred times and seasons.⁸⁹²

AN EXCURSUS ON *ELEMENTAL SPIRITS OF THE WORLD*⁸⁹³—

As noted above, the meaning of this phrase, found also in Colossians, is debated in biblical scholarship, as evidenced by the various English translations.⁸⁹⁴ Most likely, “The *elemental spirits of the world* are demonic forces which hold in thrall the minds of men and women who follow their dictates, but lose their potency as soon as those minds are emancipated, as they are by the grace of God and the power of his Spirit.”⁸⁹⁵ **Elemental spirits** operate primarily by enslaving us to religious traditions and duties that blind us to the fullness of life in Christ (Colossians 2:20-23). Though ultimately **weak and miserable** (Galatians 4:9), believers often succumb to their tactics and become enslaved to religious tradition and stay forever immature (Galatians 4:3-11).

From Colossians 2, we learn that elemental spirits also manifest themselves through what we might term maladjusted personalities—demanding personalities (Colossians 2:22); condemning personalities (Colossians 2:16); and conceited personalities (Colossians 2:18).

⁸⁹¹ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 204. “For Paul...whatever leads one away from sole reliance on Christ, whether based on good intentions or depraved desires, is sub-Christian and therefore to be condemned” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 181).

⁸⁹² This is likely a reference to Jewish religious calendaring but we cannot be certain.

⁸⁹³ NRSV; **elemental spiritual forces of the world** (TNIV).

⁸⁹⁴ See note #875 above.

⁸⁹⁵ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 204. This understanding favors the NRSV—**weak and beggarly elemental spirits**. “The elements of the world can ‘cover all the things in which man places his trust apart from the living God revealed in Christ; they become his gods, and he becomes their slave’” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 191). See also O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, pp. 129-132 and Dunn, James D.G., *The New International Greek Testament Commentary—The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, pp. 148-151.

GALATIANS 4:12-20—

This section is often referenced as Paul’s personal appeal—**I plead with you, brothers and sisters** (vs. 12). He appeals to his former relationship with the Galatians and expresses his continuing commitment.

His first appeal is that they **become like [him]** (vs. 12), that is that they embrace a law-free gospel, noting—**for I became like you** (vs. 12); that is, he exchanged a law-based approach to God as a Pharisee for a faith-based approach (as did they). Paul then states—**you have done me no wrong** (vs. 12)—meaning that they never took advantage of him when he was with them, but instead warmly received him (so why not receive him and his message now?).

This last statement then prompts him to reminisce about what occasioned his initial visit, namely, needed physical recuperation during which time he evangelized—**as you know, it was because of an illness⁸⁹⁶ that I first preached the gospel to you** (vs. 13). Their reception? **Even though my illness was a trial to you,⁸⁹⁷ you did not treat me with contempt or scorn.⁸⁹⁸ Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself** (vs. 14).

Remembrance then prompts him to realize things have changed with them—**what has happened to all your joy?** (vs. 15). The question is rhetorical, reflecting off the fact that their former joy...attributed undoubtedly to their embracing a law-free gospel...has faded. Faded too is their affection for him—**I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.⁸⁹⁹ Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?** (vv. 15-16). This last statement is Paul’s evaluation of

⁸⁹⁶ The nature of Paul’s **illness** has been the source of much speculation. “The fact that such diverse ailments as malaria, epilepsy, ophthalmia have been suggested on the basis of this passage indicates that there can be no certain diagnosis. The infirmity may have been one of these three, or it may have been something quite different; it may have been identical with the ‘splinter’ of 2 Cor 12:7, or it may not” (F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 209).

⁸⁹⁷ Or **my illness was a temptation for you to reject me**. We are not told why; it was possibly because of their worldview that illness was usually a sign of demonic influence rather than an indication that his illness was somehow repulsive.

⁸⁹⁸ The Greek verb (*ekptuo*) literally means “spit out” in disdain as a defense against demonic threats. “The Galatians resisted the temptation to see in Paul someone demonically possessed because of his sickness” (Schlier, quoted in Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 234).

⁸⁹⁹ Some read into this statement the fact that he suffered from an eye disease (ophthalmia). This is doubtful. It is likely a hyperbolic statement meaning, “You would have gone to any possible length to help me in my illness.”

what seems to be their attitude. “So, [it seems] I have become your enemy because I am telling you the truth.”⁹⁰⁰

Paul next exposes the agitators’ true colors—**those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them** (vs. 17). In contrast, his intentions have always been honorable and still are—**it is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you** (vs. 18). “Paul would not mind having his converts eagerly sought after by others besides himself—as long as the motives were pure and the intentions honorable, as was the case with himself when he was with them, but was *not* the case with the agitators now.”⁹⁰¹ As proof of his continued intentions, Paul notes—**my dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,⁹⁰² how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone,⁹⁰³ because I am perplexed⁹⁰⁴ about you!** (vv. 19-20). “There are situations in which the tone of voice and even the look on the face convey nearly as much as the words that are said, but when one is writing from a distance only the words can be conveyed.”⁹⁰⁵

GALATIANS 4:21-31—

Paul now transitions from personal appeal to scriptural support of his contention that law and spiritual freedom cannot co-exist.⁹⁰⁶ He does so by way of allegorizing the Sarah-Hagar events (**I am taking these things figuratively**⁹⁰⁷ [vs. 24]). First, however, he challenges the theology of the agitators and those accepting their error—**tell me, you who want to be under the law,⁹⁰⁸ are you not aware of what the law⁹⁰⁹ says?** (vs. 21).⁹¹⁰ He

⁹⁰⁰ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 193.

⁹⁰¹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 201.

⁹⁰² I Thessalonians 2:7-8 also expresses Paul’s pastoral heart—**just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you**. The longing he has for the Galatians is that they experience the same depth of relationship with Christ as he (*cf.* Galatians 2:20).

⁹⁰³ Paul realized that his written words were inadequate substitutes for words spoken face-to-face.

⁹⁰⁴ Or **at my wits’ end**.

⁹⁰⁵ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 213.

⁹⁰⁶ “Many people regard this as the most difficult passage in the Epistle to the Galatians. For one thing, it presupposes a knowledge of the Old Testament which few people possess today...for another, the argument of Paul is a somewhat technical one; it is the kind which would have been familiar in the Jewish rabbinical schools. It is allegorical, although not arbitrary” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 121).

⁹⁰⁷ Or **now this is an allegory** (NRSV); **now this may be interpreted allegorically** (ESV). He is giving “conceptual identifications” and not expounding the intended meaning of the Genesis narrative.

⁹⁰⁸ Or more correctly, **under law** (NASB). He is referencing law in principle, not just the Mosaic law.

then begins his allegorical application of the Sarah-Hagar event, so as to make them aware of the implications of a law-based gospel and the fact it cannot co-exist with a law-free gospel—for it is written⁹¹¹ that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman⁹¹² and the other by the free woman.⁹¹³ His son by the slave woman⁹¹⁴ was born as the result of human effort,⁹¹⁵ but his son by the free woman⁹¹⁶ was born as the result of a divine promise (vv. 22-23). The result of human effort...the result of a divine promise are obvious contrasts, and represent respectively the contrast between reliance on self (law) and reliance on God (justified and sanctified by grace through faith as expounded in the promise).

The allegorical (figurative) application Paul sees is that **the women represent two covenants** (vs. 24). One covenant is the Sinaitic covenant (**one covenant is from Mount Sinai** [vs. 24]),⁹¹⁷ and the other is the promise covenant given to Abraham; each covenant produces “children”—children either in bondage, for being under law is to be in bondage (**one covenant...bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar** [vs. 24]), or children who are free because they embrace a law-free gospel (**therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free⁹¹⁸ woman** [vs. 31]). Paul supports his premise by quoting and applying Isaiah 54:1 (vs. 27). Notes Fung—

- *The “barren woman,” the one who was “never in labor” and the “desolate woman” in the prophecy all refer to Jerusalem before the Jews returned from Exile; whereas the one “who has a husband” refers to Jerusalem before the Exile itself. The prophet says that Jerusalem as she would be after the exiles had returned would have more children than she did before the Exile robbed*

⁹⁰⁹ **The law** here references the Pentateuch.

⁹¹⁰ “With these Judaizers Paul uses an *argumentum ad hominem*. That is, he meets them and refutes them on their own ground. He exposes the inconsistency, the illogicality of their position” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 122).

⁹¹¹ A generic reference to portions of Genesis.

⁹¹² Clearly representative of law.

⁹¹³ Clearly representative of the promise embraced by faith.

⁹¹⁴ Ishmael.

⁹¹⁵ Or **according to the flesh** (NRSV).

⁹¹⁶ Isaac.

⁹¹⁷ Paul also uses the analogy of **the present city Jerusalem** (said to be **in slavery with her children**) and **the Jerusalem that is above** (said to be **our mother** like Sarah [vv. 25-26]) to represent law and the promise. “The fact of bondage holds together Hagar and Ishmael, the Sinaitic covenant of law, the present earthly Jerusalem (which stands by metonymy for Judaism, with its trust in physical descent from Abraham and reliance on legal observance as the way of salvation), and her children, that is, all who adhere to the law as the means of justification and the principle of life” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 209).

⁹¹⁸ Paul’s referenced freedom would be freedom from restrictions imposed by law.

*her of her children...it follows then in application that the Christian Church, which corresponds to Sarah and the Jerusalem above, was more fruitful than Judaism, which corresponds to Hagar and “the Jerusalem of today.”*⁹¹⁹

Chapter 4’s final paragraph (vv. 28-31) offers a continuative explanation (**now** [vs. 28]); but first Paul notes that believers owe their spiritual existence to the promise (available by grace through faith) and not to law, even as Isaac owed his birth to promise—**you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise** (vs. 28). He then begins his continuative explanation by noting hostility between Isaac’s and Ishmael’s descendants to reinforce the “hostility” between a law-based gospel and a law-free gospel—**at that time the son born by human efforts persecuted⁹²⁰ the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now⁹²¹** (vs. 30). Finally, because a law-based gospel and a law-free gospel cannot co-exist, legalism must be driven out, even as Sarah requested that she and Isaac be separated from Hagar and Ishmael—**what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son”** (vs. 30).

⁹¹⁹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 211.

⁹²⁰ There is no record in Genesis of Ishmael persecuting Isaac; the closest parallel is his mocking Isaac (Genesis 21:9). We cannot be sure, therefore, of Paul’s reference, lest he is referencing struggles between their descendants (*cf.* Judges 8:24).

⁹²¹ See the persecution of Paul and Barnabas by **the Jewish leaders** in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50).

GALATIANS 5:1—

This is considered a “bridge verse,” serving as both a summation of Galatians 2:14-4:31 and an introduction to Chapter 5. Paul’s declaration of what is to be lived out with Christ is definitive—**it is for freedom⁹²² that Christ has set us free**—as is his imperative for strong resolve—**stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery**. “The indicative states that Christ has set believers free with the gift of freedom that is proffered in the gospel; the imperative imposes upon them the task of preserving that freedom or rather of continuing in that freedom.”⁹²⁴ “The gospel of Messiah Jesus was not about their distinctiveness as Gentiles, but about freedom from such distinctions for both Jew and Gentile.”⁹²⁵

GALATIANS 5:2-12—

“In this summarizing appeal, Paul again lays bare the absoluteness of the opposition between faith and works, taking issue with the latter principle as it found representative expression in the Judaizers’ demand for circumcision.”⁹²⁶ **Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you** (vs. 2) is in effect saying, “Pay close attention and let me make this perfectly clear. I’m a former ‘insider’ of a law-based approach to life with God and know what I am talking about.” What he wants to make perfectly clear is—**if⁹²⁷ you let yourselves be circumcised,⁹²⁸ Christ will be of no value⁹²⁹ to you at all** (vs. 2)—something he is so passionate about he virtually repeats himself—**again I declare to every man who lets**

⁹²² Or **with a view to enjoying freedom**. Again, Paul’s referenced freedom would be freedom from restrictions imposed by law.

⁹²³ Or **do not submit** (NRSV); **do not be entangled in**.

⁹²⁴ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 217.

⁹²⁵ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 263.

⁹²⁶ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 221.

⁹²⁷ **If** (Greek, *ean*) indicates that they were considering circumcision but had not yet done it.

⁹²⁸ “Circumcision so much embodied and expressed Jewish identity, distinctively Jewish identity...that it had become a mark of Jew as *distinct from* Gentile. A different locus for the identity of the people of God was therefore necessary” (James D. G. Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 265). This clearly states the agitators were calling for physical circumcision.

⁹²⁹ Or **of no benefit** (NRSV).

himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law (vs. 3).⁹³⁰ “He who submits to circumcision as a legal requirement, necessary for salvation, accepts thereby the principle of salvation by law-keeping, and salvation by law-keeping implies salvation by keeping the whole law.”⁹³¹

Hence—you who are trying to be⁹³² justified by the law⁹³³ have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from⁹³⁴ grace (vs. 4). To forsake righteousness by faith is self-expulsion from Christ for the two approaches do not mix. Vv. 5-6 then present “a series of dogmatic abbreviations which had been used before in the letter”⁹³⁵—but by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision⁹³⁶ has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love⁹³⁷ (vv. 5-6). Faith produces in Christ-followers visible results, demonstrated acts of love; by implication, a law-based gospel does not.

Vv. 7-12 close the section. “Here the tension is at its sharpest and most nerve-racking... with a series of abrupt expostulations, like snorts of indignation, betraying Paul’s extreme anxiety that he might lose out in Galatia.”⁹³⁸ He first uses a favorite metaphor—you were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? (vs. 7), noting—that kind of persuasion⁹³⁹ does not come from the One who called you (vs. 8). Paul then quotes a proverbial saying to show how even the smallest amount of false theology can cause huge concerns—“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (vs. 9) and (somewhat surprisingly) states that he trusts the Galatians will agree with what he has just said (vv. 8-9)—I am confident in the Lord that you

⁹³⁰ Free choice of circumcision, along with observing special calendaring days, puts one under legal obligation to the entire system of a law-based approach to God.

⁹³¹ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 230.

⁹³² Or **are thinking about being**.

⁹³³ That is by one’s own merit.

⁹³⁴ Or **are not relying on**.

⁹³⁵ Beck, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 229.

⁹³⁶ “The contrast between faith and circumcision corresponds to the contrast between faith and law spoken of in the preceding verses (vv. 4f.)” (Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 228).

⁹³⁷ “This verse provides a basis for response to any criticism of Paul’s view of justification by faith—that it encouraged passive quietism, an inactivism, or even antinomianism” (James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pg. 272).

⁹³⁸ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 273.

⁹³⁹ “It should not be ignored that Paul thought of accepting the gospel in terms of an intellectual process of being persuaded or convinced as to its veracity, as distinct from some irrational experience from which the mind could be disengaged” (James D.G. Dunn, *ibid.*, pp. 274-275).

will take no other view (vs. 10). Paul next reminds the Galatians of the consequences the agitators will suffer for their false doctrine—**the one who is throwing you into confusion will have to pay the penalty,⁹⁴⁰ whoever that may be⁹⁴¹** (vs. 10); he then clears his name with reference to any accusation that he himself preaches or lives a law-based gospel⁹⁴²—**if I am still⁹⁴³ preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?** (vs. 11). Paul ends the paragraph with one of the most sarcastic remarks in all his writings, designed as a caricature to discredit the agitators—**as for those agitators, I wish⁹⁴⁴ they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!⁹⁴⁵** (vs. 12). “Underlying the sarcasm and crudity of the comment is Paul’s understanding of circumcision as purely a physical act without religious significance...which when done either to gain acceptance before God or to achieve a more acceptable lifestyle becomes simply bodily mutilation.”⁹⁴⁶

GALATIANS 5:13-26—

Paul concludes Chapter 5 with a general description of life in the Spirit, teachings and exhortations on practical Christian living. He begins by reiterating that **[we] were called to be free⁹⁴⁷** (vs. 13); however, that freedom can never be used as a springboard to indulge the depravity of the *sarx*—**but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature⁹⁴⁸** (vs. 13). “Paul is taking issue with the false position that freedom from the law issues in moral license.”⁹⁴⁹ **Rather, serve one another humbly in love** (vs. 13).⁹⁵⁰ We

⁹⁴⁰ **The penalty** likely references consequences meted out at the Great White Throne Judgment.

⁹⁴¹ Paul either does not know them personally or does not want to acknowledge them.

⁹⁴² Though this apparently addresses an accusation, we do not know the agitators’ bases for it. Perhaps it was because “Paul saw it as perfectly legitimate for Jewish Christians to express their faith in Jesus through the traditional Jewish practices” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 232).

⁹⁴³ **Still** references the fact that as a Pharisee Paul did embrace a law-based righteousness.

⁹⁴⁴ **I wish** expresses an attainable reality.

⁹⁴⁵ Or **would castrate themselves!** (NRSV); **would have themselves made eunuchs** (NEB); **tell those who are disturbing you I would like to see the knife slip** (JB). The Latin Vulgate treated the statement ambiguously, affecting the NKJV—I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

⁹⁴⁶ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 234.

⁹⁴⁷ Or **for the purpose of not being in bondage to law.**

⁹⁴⁸ **The sinful nature** is seen here as a malicious opponent to our freedom in Christ.

⁹⁴⁹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 243. “The transition to adulthood spells new freedoms, but in our society freedom is often defined in self-centered and self-indulgent terms...each adult is his or her own sovereign. One’s primary responsibility is to define and fully express one’s self. This is far from how Paul defines freedom. He has a different view of what we’re free *from* and what we’re free *for*...Paul says Christians who truly

see here that freedom from law brings with it its own moral obligation, that of actively operating in the best interest of other believers. “It is the necessity of commitment and the difficulties of maintaining human relationships that cause Paul to describe the free exercise of love as a form of mutual enslavement.”⁹⁵¹ As in Romans 13:8-10, Paul reminds the Galatians that the spirit and intention of the law is **fulfilled⁹⁵²in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself”** (vs. 14, quoting Leviticus 19:18). Earlier, Paul noted that something **happened to all [their] joy** (Galatians 4:15) as a result of the agitators; here, we see another effect—**biting and devouring each other⁹⁵³** that could go so far as to destroy each other (vs. 15). “This vice...if not checked...could lead to the disintegration of their fellowship and the disappearance of the churches of Galatia.”⁹⁵⁴

Vs. 16 then clarifies by showing how the high calling of vv. 13-15 is attained—**so I say,⁹⁵⁵ walk⁹⁵⁶ by the Spirit,⁹⁵⁷ and you will not gratify⁹⁵⁸ the desires of the sinful nature**. It is a call to be conscious of the Spirit’s presence in all we do and think, and to ask for His enablement to die to sin, knowing that He alone can and does disarm **the desires of the sinful nature**. “This is based on a charismatic ethic, depending more on inward apprehension of what is the appropriate conduct than on rule book or tradition.”⁹⁵⁹ He then further explains vs. 16, giving one of the most realistic and psychologically insightful observations in the entire epistle—**for the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want** (vs. 17).

are Christians—who live freely in Christ and follow the Holy Spirit—will be more holy and loving than those who remain enslaved to the law” (Scot McKnight and Karen Lee-Thorp, *op. cit.*, pg. 55).

⁹⁵⁰ Or **through love become slaves to one another** (NRSV). Paul gives some definitive content as to what this entails when listing the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23).

⁹⁵¹ Betz, quote in Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 245.

⁹⁵² Or **summed up; carried out**.

⁹⁵³ The language suggests wild animals preying on one another.

⁹⁵⁴ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 242.

⁹⁵⁵ See note #822 above.

⁹⁵⁶ Or **conduct yourselves**.

⁹⁵⁷ Rather than by laws and statutes.

⁹⁵⁸ Contra NRSV—**and do not gratify**.

⁹⁵⁹ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 296.

Life for a Christ-follower is one of inescapable tension between the two natures within. It is impossible to remain neutral; we will serve the sinful nature or follow the Spirit.⁹⁶⁰

But a Christ-follower is not “a helpless spectator or an unwilling pawn in the fierce battle between the flesh and the Spirit.”⁹⁶¹ We have the ability to be constrained by a compelling inner force, the Spirit Himself—if⁹⁶² **you are led⁹⁶³ by the Spirit, you are not under the law**⁹⁶⁴ (vs. 18). “What is needed in our battle with the sinful nature is the Spirit, or, alternatively expressed, the law written within, to provide an inner drive of greater and more enduring strength, the supplanting of one motive centre (selfish desire) by another of greater power (the Spirit).”⁹⁶⁵

Paul next moves to illustrate some ways in which the sinful nature manifests itself—the **acts of the sinful nature are obvious** (vs. 19)—by listing fifteen such **acts**, ranging from **sexual immorality**⁹⁶⁶ to **selfish ambition** to **envy** to **drunkenness**. He concludes by stating that these are merely representative and not exhaustive—**and the like** (vv. 19-21). It is the first of two lists showing the antinomy of the sinful nature and the Spirit. “The seemingly chaotic arrangement of these terms is reflective of the chaotic nature of evil; this chaos is to be contrasted with the oneness of the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ and its orderly arrangement.”⁹⁶⁷ He concludes the list by noting—I **warn you, as I did before,**⁹⁶⁸ **that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God** (vs. 21). **Live**⁹⁶⁹ references habitual behavior and not occasional lapses. “God’s reign or rule is moral in

⁹⁶⁰ “By ‘the sinful nature’ Paul means what we are by nature and inheritance...some teachers maintain that the Christian has no inner conflict, no civil war within himself, because (they say) his sinful nature has been eradicated and his old nature is dead. This passage contradicts such a view. Christian people, in Luther’s graphic expression, are ‘not stocks and stones’, that is, people who ‘are never moved with anything, never feel any lust or desires of the flesh’...the conflict between the sinful nature and the Spirit is fierce and unremitting” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 146).

⁹⁶¹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 251.

⁹⁶² Or **since** (Greek, *ei*).

⁹⁶³ “Led emphasizes the voluntary subjugation of one’s will to the Spirit who leads...the antidote to license in the Christian life is not laws, as the Judaizers argued, but openness to the Spirit and being guided by the Spirit” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 246).

⁹⁶⁴ That is, under sin’s dominion (*cf.* Romans 6:14).

⁹⁶⁵ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 300. “The common feature in this catalogue of vices seems to reside not in the precise ways in which these fifteen items manifest themselves but in the self-centeredness or egocentricity that underlies all of them...that which separates us from God is our own idea of autonomy—that is, our attempt to think and live apart from God” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 266).

⁹⁶⁶ Greek, *porneia*, representing any sexual activity outside monogamous heterosexual sex within marriage, activity such as homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia, Lesbianism, adultery, fornication, etc.

⁹⁶⁷ Betz, quoted in Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 253.

⁹⁶⁸ Likely when he first brought them the gospel.

⁹⁶⁹ Or **practice** (NASB). See also 1 John 3:4-10.

nature; those who consistently behave in ways that are opposed to God's nature show thereby that they have not accepted God's rule through Christ in their lives."⁹⁷⁰ "Showing themselves to be without the transforming gift of faith,"⁹⁷¹ they miss out on the kingdom's present benefits and its eschatological benefit of eternity with Christ.

By way of contrast (**but** [vs. 22]), Paul then gives a representative list of qualities produced by the Spirit in a Christ-follower's life—**love, joy, peace, patience,**⁹⁷² **kindness, goodness,**⁹⁷³ **faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** (vv. 22-23),⁹⁷⁴ noting that no law is required to produce these virtues, nor indeed can it—**against such things**⁹⁷⁵ **there is no law** (vs. 23). "Paul...means that when these qualities are in view we are in a sphere with which law has nothing to do. Law may prescribe certain forms of conduct and prohibit others, but these virtues cannot be legally enforced."⁹⁷⁶

Chapter 5 closes reminding us 1) that we have died to our sinful nature, that something has fundamentally changed at the core of our desires, and so we cannot walk with Christ and live in libertine fashion—**those who belong to Christ Jesus**⁹⁷⁷ **have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires** (vs. 25); 2) that the presence of the Spirit means He is to be the shaping influence of our conduct—**since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit** (vs. 25); and 3) that following Him and manifesting His fruit shows up relationally through genuine concern for others as opposed to being self-focused—**let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other** (vs. 26).

AN EXCURSUS ON THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT—

"Such lists as the fruit of the Spirit...explain how the new life in Christ is to express itself...the new life is the gift of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 6:25), and this life evidences itself in the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:20), which Paul interprets in terms of Christian virtues."⁹⁷⁸ As noted, though not intended to be exhaustive in defining godly character,

⁹⁷⁰ Fung, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262.

⁹⁷¹ Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 164.

⁹⁷² Or **longsuffering** (NKJV).

⁹⁷³ Or **generosity** (NRSV).

⁹⁷⁴ See Excursus below on a definition of each of these nine qualities.

⁹⁷⁵ **Such things** indicates that again Paul is giving a representative and not an exhaustive list.

⁹⁷⁶ Bruce, *Galatians*, pg. 255.

⁹⁷⁷ Or **are in Christ Jesus**.

⁹⁷⁸ Ladd, George, *A Theology of the New Testament—Revised Edition*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000 reprint, pp. 556, 562.

Paul's list in Galatians 5:22-23 does encapsulate Jesus-like character. It reminds us that "Attitude Is Everything," and helps us define how to carry out the command of Galatians 5:13C, **serve one another humbly in love**. As previously noted as well, the fruit is in contrast to the toxic attitudes of the sinful nature/ego that form the internal barrier to healthy relationships (Galatians 5:19-21).⁹⁷⁹

- **Love** (Greek, *agape*)—"Agape denotes an undefeatable benevolence and unconquerable goodwill that always seeks the highest good of the other person, no matter what he/she does. It is the self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return, and does not consider the worth of its object. *Agape*...refers to the will rather than the emotion. *Agape* describes the unconditional love God has for the world."⁹⁸⁰
- **Joy** (Greek, *chara*)—found only in relationship with Jesus (Romans 5:11), *chara* is the assurance that we are members of God's family regardless of what life brings (Luke 10:17-20; Romans 8:38-39). It is the ever-deepening awareness that our lives are hidden in Christ and that we can be led by God's Spirit through anything.
- **Peace** (Greek, *eirene*)—*eirene* has to do with personal wholeness and beneficial relationships. It has its roots in the Old Testament concept of *shalom*—well-being in all areas of life. "*Eirene* is a state of rest, quietness, and calmness; an absence of strife; tranquility. It generally denotes a perfect well-being...harmonious relationships between God and men and men and men."⁹⁸¹
- **Patience** (Greek, *makrothumia*)—related to the Hebrew *hesed* (steadfast or covenant love), *makrothumia* refers to exercising as much grace toward people as God exercises toward us. It is closely related to *agape*, for **love is patient** (1 Corinthians 13:4). "The word denotes lenience, forbearance,

⁹⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that in Galatians Paul lists three barriers to dynamic relationships—the *external* barrier of people's false opinions and advice (Galatians 5:7-9); the *internal* barrier of egocentricity (Galatians 5:19-21); and the *emotional* barrier of discouragement brought on by trying to get along with others, particularly difficult people (Galatians 6:9-10).

⁹⁸⁰ Mills, Dick, in Hayford, Jack, General Editor, *Spirit Filled Life Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1991, pg. 1694.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 1510.

fortitude, patient endurance, longsuffering...the ability to endure persecution and ill-treatment. It describes a person who has the power to exercise revenge but instead exercises restraint.”⁹⁸²

- **Kindness** (Greek, *chrestotes*)—*chrestotes* has to do with acting with godly graciousness toward others, even if we are inclined to do otherwise. It describes someone with a gentle disposition and a benevolent attitude; someone from whom the Holy Spirit has removed abrasive attitudes.
- **Goodness** (Greek, *agathosune*)—the opposite of envy, *agathosune* is the trait of demonstrating acts of generosity towards others; of giving both verbal and practical affirmation. It describes “a bountiful propensity both to will and to do what is good,”⁹⁸³ even as God demonstrates toward us.
- **Faithfulness** (Greek, *pistis*)—*pistis* has a broad range of meanings. Here it refers to a character that is steadfast and trustworthy. It focuses on one’s reliability—a reliability modeled after God’s.
- **Gentleness** (Greek, *praotes*)—originally referring to that happy medium between passion and no feeling at all, *praotes* in the New Testament references a disposition that is balanced, tranquil, considerate, unpretentious and has its passions under control. “The person who possesses this quality pardons injuries, corrects faults, and rules his own spirit well.”⁹⁸⁴ **Gentleness** is not a personality type, but a Spirit-shaped heart attitude that controls our disposition toward others.
- **Self-control** (Greek, *enkrateia*)—*enkrateia* has the idea of being able to morally restrain oneself when tempted by evil and being able to voluntarily abstain from anything which might hinder experiencing God’s purposes in life. Such brings true ethical freedom. *Enkrateia* stands in Paul’s Galatians’ list in direct contrast to **the acts of the sinful nature** (Galatians 5:19-21).

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, pg. 1878.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pg. 1713.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 1847.

GALATIANS 6:1-6—

Having given a general description of life in the Spirit, Paul transitions to some specifics of what that looks like, examples of how His fruit is demonstrated toward fellow Christ-followers. The first specific has to do with restoring **someone**⁹⁸⁵ **...caught**⁹⁸⁶ **in a sin** (vs. 1). The restoration is to be initiated by any Christ-follower (**you who live by the Spirit** [vs. 1]), and it is to be done considerately and not censoriously (**restore**⁹⁸⁷ **that person gently**⁹⁸⁸ [vs. 1]). A warning is attached to the exhortation—**but watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted** (vs. 1)—because Paul knows that anything/anyone can become a source of temptation.

A second specific of fruitful living by the Spirit is that of **carry[ing]**⁹⁸⁹ **each other's burdens** (vs. 2). It is a call to stay sensitive to when fellow believers are on “life overload” and need spiritual, emotional and/or practical help. “At any one time all members of a Christian congregation would have such burdens to shoulder, and when such burdens outgrew the individual’s strength, it was important that there should be a supportive family-community to help out.”⁹⁹⁰ Doing thusly follows Christ’s example of helping people—**in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ** (vs. 2).

Knowing that spiritual pride prevents one from fulfilling vv. 1-2, Paul now rounds off his teaching by warning against acting in such a fashion—**if any of you think you are something when you are nothing**,⁹⁹¹ **you deceive**⁹⁹² **yourselves** (vs. 3). In order to

⁹⁸⁵ That is, a fellow Christ-follower.

⁹⁸⁶ **Caught** refers to inadvertent wrongdoing rather than intentional sin; **do something wrong...on a sudden impulse** (NEB); **detected** (NRSV).

⁹⁸⁷ This is the same Greek verb (*katartizo*) translated **equip** in Ephesians 4:11 and connotes putting in order, repairing or making complete. “Here it is evidently used in an ethical sense to mean ‘restore’ to a former good state” (Richard Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 273).

⁹⁸⁸ This is a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23. Though we are called to address specific transgressions so as to see change, the idea is to avoid “railing” while doing so.

⁹⁸⁹ “**Carry** signifies lending a hand to help by lifting heavy loads. This does not involve transference of the burden (see 2 Cor. 8:13)...but Christian love must ever be careful to relieve each in turn when overtaxed by crushing loads” (Frederic Rendall, *op. cit.*, pg. 189).

⁹⁹⁰ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 322.

⁹⁹¹ **Or if any of you think you are more of a “spiritual giant” than you really are.** Spiritual conceit makes it impossible to effectively correct fellow Christ-followers or to effectively carry their burdens.

avoid such self-deception—**each of [us] should test [our] own actions. Then [we] can take pride in [ourselves], without comparing [ourselves] to somebody else**⁹⁹³ (vs. 4). In other words, we should “self-scrutinize” our attitudes and actions and realize that we are ultimately responsible only for ourselves, though we do speak into others’ lives and we do help them. “It is on his own conduct and performance that each person should concentrate, not the conduct and performance of others; he is to engage in self-assessment, not in critical evaluation of another.”⁹⁹⁴ Paul then gives a reason for vs. 4—**for each of you should carry your own load**⁹⁹⁵ (vs. 5)—emphasizing that each Christ-follower ultimately answers to God for their own conduct and life performance.

Vs. 6 closes the opening paragraph by giving an example of vs. 2 and by showing that vs. 5 is not intended to cut off helping those in full-time vocational ministry—**nevertheless, those who receive instruction in the Word should share all good things**⁹⁹⁶ **with their instructor.**⁹⁹⁷ “Paul, of course, had no teachers’ union to which to appeal for correcting injustice. His recourse was to lay the onus on those who benefited from Christian instruction to compensate adequately those who gave the instruction, which is still the most appropriate course of action today.”⁹⁹⁸

GALATIANS 6:7-10—

Paul returns to the matter of the Spirit-sinful nature conflict addressed in Chapter 5, addressing the Galatians with a “make no mistake about it” introduction—**do not be deceived** (vs. 7). What they are to make no mistake about is the fact that **God cannot be mocked**⁹⁹⁹ (vs. 7). The attempted mockery is that of life-style, of “claim[ing] to accept the gospel and the obligations that come with it and at the same time liv[ing] in obedience to the flesh instead of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁰⁰ He then notes the explicit reason for this—**for you reap whatever you sow** (vs. 7 [NRSV])—showing a one-on-one correlation between our

⁹⁹² Or **hoodwink**.

⁹⁹³ Or **then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another** (NASB).

⁹⁹⁴ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 290.

⁹⁹⁵ Or **your own proper burden** in contrast to the overload of vs. 2.

⁹⁹⁶ **All good things** includes financial support, as well as affirmation, compliments, hospitality, etc.

⁹⁹⁷ We do not know why this particular example came to Paul’s mind.

⁹⁹⁸ Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 279.

⁹⁹⁹ Or **fooled; outwitted**.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 294.

life-style as Christ-followers and God’s response to it. This is then further clarified—**those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction;**¹⁰⁰¹ **those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life** (vs. 8)—as Paul reiterates the sowing and reaping consequences of yielding to the sinful nature or to the Spirit. So then—**let us not become weary**¹⁰⁰² **in doing good,**¹⁰⁰³ **for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up** (vs. 9). In other words, let’s be sure we do not rest on the oars of our justification and lose motivation to keep in step with the Spirit and instead become self-focused (sinful nature focused). “For Paul, the fruit of a spiritual harvest comes through the concurring actions of both God and the believer, with the believer’s perseverance being generally in response to the Spirit’s work in his or her life.”¹⁰⁰⁴

Because the Spirit’s influence shows up in what a Christ-follower does, Paul concludes¹⁰⁰⁵—**therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good**¹⁰⁰⁶ **to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers**¹⁰⁰⁷ (vs. 10).

- *The universal character of God’s redemption corresponds to the universality of Christian ethical and social responsibility. If God’s redemption in Christ is universal, the Christian community is obliged to disregard all ethnic, national, cultural, social, sexual, and even religious distinctions within the human community. Since before God there is no partiality, there cannot be partiality in the Christian’s attitude towards his fellow man.*¹⁰⁰⁸

GALATIANS 6:11-18—

For all intents and purposes, the letter is over. However, “before concluding his letter Paul returns once more to the antithesis of cross and circumcision, setting them forth this

¹⁰⁰¹ Contextually, **destruction** references not experiencing eternal life. It is debated as to whether or not Paul has eschatological eternal life in view, or “already” eternal life. His main point is responsible life-style, so it is probably best not to make too much of eternal destruction.

¹⁰⁰² Or **lax**.

¹⁰⁰³ **Doing good** presupposes the presence of the Spirit. “The expression includes everything the Christian is responsible for doing and so is identical with the concepts of the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ and of ‘following the Spirit’” (Betz, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 281).

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 282.

¹⁰⁰⁵ This is possibly a conclusion going back to Galatians 5:13; at the very least it is a conclusion of 6:1-6.

¹⁰⁰⁶ This is a generic term that includes both practical and spiritual good.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Paul appends (but does not nullify) his previous statement, undoubtedly based on Jesus’ statement about loving one another (John 13:34-35).

¹⁰⁰⁸ Betz, quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, pg. 283.

time as representing respectively the true and the false ground of boasting, and thus carrying a stage further his polemic against the Judaizers and their way of legal observance.”¹⁰⁰⁹ Paul begins the final section by stating—**see what large letters¹⁰¹⁰ I use as I write to you with my own hand!** (vs. 11). If there was an amanuensis, this indicates he took the writing tool and wrote himself as a means of assuring the letter’s genuineness. He then moves to describe the Judaizers and expose their motives for one last time—**those who want to impress others by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason¹⁰¹¹ they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ** (vs. 12). In other words, they want to be liked and avoid being hassled by like-minded Jewish Christians. “The policy of insisting on circumcision was a way of removing that which in the common preaching of a crucified Messiah constituted an offence to most other Jews.”¹⁰¹² Furthermore—**not even those who are circumcised keep the law,¹⁰¹³ yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast¹⁰¹⁴ about your circumcision in the flesh¹⁰¹⁵** (vs. 13). “When Gentiles subjected *their* flesh to the *Jewish* rite of circumcision, they gave *Jews* grounds to boast in *their* flesh thus subordinated to and incorporated within distinctive Jewish identity.”¹⁰¹⁶

As for Paul personally—**may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through¹⁰¹⁷ which the world has been crucified to me,¹⁰¹⁸ and I to the world** (vs. 14).¹⁰¹⁹ He had learned to reassess all of life—career, people, possessions, character, opinion, etc.—in light of the kingdom of God and its values. He then states a maxim to reinforce that Jew and Gentile distinctions are of no fundamental importance in the

¹⁰⁰⁹ Fung, *op. cit.*, pg. 300.

¹⁰¹⁰ “This probably refers to the sprawling untidy letters of one not a scribe by trade, and who was, perhaps, more used to writing in Semitic characters than Greek” (R. Alan Cole, *op. cit.*, pg. 180). This verse has been used by some to surmise that Paul’s earlier referenced illness was an eye problem.

¹⁰¹¹ **Only reason** is what is known as “exaggeration of polemic.”

¹⁰¹² Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 337.

¹⁰¹³ That is, they were not consistent in keeping the law themselves. We do not know Paul’s referenced points of their inconsistency nor how he came to know this.

¹⁰¹⁴ Or **advance their ego**.

¹⁰¹⁵ Or **that they may boast in ethnic identity and prerogative**.

¹⁰¹⁶ Dunn, *Galatians*, pg. 339.

¹⁰¹⁷ Or **by** (NRSV).

¹⁰¹⁸ Or **by which I have been fenced off from boasting in externals**.

¹⁰¹⁹ See also vs. 17—**from now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus**.

kingdom of God, only incorporation into it—**neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation** (vs. 15).

As he prepares to close, Paul gives a benediction—**peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule,¹⁰²⁰ upon the Israel of God** (vs. 16 [RSV]).¹⁰²¹ Though highly debated as to who Israel is in this verse,¹⁰²² Paul is likely equating **all who walk by this rule** (all Christ-followers regardless of ethnicity) with **the Israel of God**. “It is highly probable that when Paul speaks of the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16) he is referring to the church as the true spiritual Israel.”¹⁰²³ It is followed by another benediction that closes the letter—**the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen** (vs. 18).

¹⁰²⁰ **This rule** likely references the maxim of vs. 15, including its implications.

¹⁰²¹ Or **as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God** (ESV).

¹⁰²² Contrast RSV with ESV. The ESV sees the blessing extended to two people groups—**all who walk** referencing believing Gentiles and **the Israel of God** referencing believing Jews who realize the unimportance of circumcision.

¹⁰²³ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 584. “The connecting particle *kai* (**and** [ESV]) should be translated ‘even,’ not ‘and,’ or be omitted (as in RSV). The Christian church enjoys a direct continuity with God’s people in the Old Testament. Those who are in Christ today are ‘the true circumcision’ (Phil. 3:3), ‘Abraham’s offspring’ (Gal. 3:29) and ‘the Israel of God’” (John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, pg. 180).