

NOTES ON ROMANS 1

1:1-7

- (1) Paul identifies himself as a “slave of Jesus Christ” and an “apostle called” (1:1).
 - a. The Roman context: imperial officials often had the title “slave of Caesar”
 - b. A slave was only the agent of his or her master—Paul’s emphasis falls on his ministry as being authorized by Christ.
 - c. This raises the question of authority: Who is in charge of the world?
 - d. “Apostle” comes from the Greek verb “to send”; an apostle is a representative or ambassador. This status rests on election.
- (2) “The gospel of God”: the gospel derives from God, the same God revealed in the history of Israel (1:2). This gospel was proclaimed beforehand in Israel’s scriptures by prophets (meaning all through whom God spoke—remember that in Judaism Moses was the ultimate prophet).
- (3) 1:3-4: These verses may be cited from an early creed, expressing the belief that Jesus is the promised Davidic messiah but whom the resurrection reveals to have also been the Son of God. In the resurrection Jesus’ pre-resurrection identity is revealed. The gospel is principally about Jesus Christ who is the Sovereign of the world; this is the significance of the title “Lord”.
- (4) 1:5 stresses the connection between the risen Lord and Paul’s apostolic ministry. Grace (*charis*) is access to God without qualification, favor given without some type of exchange. Note that Paul thinks of faith and obedience as essentially being synonymous (cf. 16:26). The obedience he has in mind is produced by the gospel. Note also the scope of Paul’s missionary calling to “all the nations”. Romans is an invitation to participate in a global mission.
- (5) Called to be saints” (1:7): The house churches in Rome are addressed in accordance to their central reality—what is it that holds the geographically and ethnically diverse churches together? The one calling that they have from God to holiness. This anticipates the theme of chapters 5-8.

1:8-12

- (1) 1:8-10: Paul thinks of all believers as interconnected such that the spread of the faith in Rome is good news for all Christians. This interconnectedness manifests itself in many ways, one way is intercessory prayer. His visit to Rome is something which Paul understands to have been made possible by God—it is not a random undertaking or a courtesy call.
- (2) Note that in 1:11-12 Paul understands his relationship to the Roman house churches to be reciprocal—the parts of the Body are mutually sustaining.

1:13-15

(1) 1:13 notes that Paul had intended to visit Rome for some time (cf. 15:23).

(2) The visit to Rome is directly related to Paul's apostolic, missionary vocation. The reference to a "harvest" is probably a reference to the mission to the Gentiles. 15:28-29 indicates that Paul hopes that the Romans will fund his mission to Spain.

(3) The scope of Paul's mission explodes the cultural categories of Greek and barbarian. Greeks (and Latin speakers) were thought to be civilized, cultured and rational while barbarians (anyone outside the Greco-Roman world) were thought to be uncivilized, uncultured and sub-human, not capable of rationality. Paul insists that the gospel is for all and transcends such human distinctions.

(4) Paul's mission is to take him to what was then regarded as the end of the world—Spain.

1:16-17

(1) 1:16: Addresses a crucial issue—the gospel of a crucified messiah would have been inherently shameful in the Greco-Roman world. (The ultimate purpose of crucifixion was to inflict a shameful death.) The cross appears to demean God. Paul refuses to live within the cultural strictures of shame and honor (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

(2) The word gospel was not originally a Christian word—it was used to designate the rule of Augustus Caesar and the beginning of successive emperors who took to themselves the titles of Savior and Lord. Paul's alternative use of gospel to refer to a crucified Galilean rabbi raises profound questions about power.

(3) For Paul, gospel designates God's restoration of his righteous sovereignty over his disobedient creation—the restoration has been effected in Jesus' death and resurrection. The gospel of Christ crucified overturns the whole Roman imperial system of honor/shame and conquest.

(4) "To everyone who believes" (1:16): Paul's understanding of faith is essentially communal—to believe is to be incorporated into the alternative human order that God has established in Christ (the Church). Faith refers to an on-going orientation to God, an orientation which motivates all behavior.—it is not merely a set of opinions or feelings. "The power of God for salvation" (1:16): salvation means the restoration of all creation (cf. Romans 8), deliverance from evil power and sin and deliverance from God's righteous wrath. The power of God overturns all cultural claims to superiority.

(5) "The Righteousness of God": an eschatological term which refers to God's loyalty to and sovereignty over his creation. Human salvation and the integrity of creation are predicated upon

this. The righteousness of God is seen, in part, in a granted obedience among human beings. The Church is the beachhead of God's re-creation of humanity.

(6) "Revealed from faith for faith" or "beginning and ending with faith" (1:17): faith is the appropriation of God's saving power. This has to be qualified in two senses. First, faith is itself made possible by God and, second, faith is not a static entity but is manifested in increasing obedience.

(7) "The righteous shall live by faith" (1:17; cited from Habbakuk 2:4): Here righteous has the sense of "one who has been put right with God".

1:18-23

(1) Paul's argument in this section is this: The Cross reveals the human tendency to suppress the truth about God and even to wage war (unsuccessfully) against him. The denial of God in favor of human systems produces cultures which are in a state of God-denial and God-suppression. For Paul, this can be seen in both the Roman Empire and in ethnocentric Judaism.

(2) The objects of God's wrath are human "impiety" and "wrongdoing"—these terms are not merely synonymous. Impiety was considered a horrible thing in the Greco-Roman world and was failure to respect deity. Impiety is an attitude not simply an action. For Paul, the essence of sin is the suppression of the truth about God.

(3) Paul's idea that knowledge of God is available to all through creation would have gone against both Greco-Roman religion (which supposed that only the wise really had knowledge of the gods) and Judaism (which supposed that pagans had no real knowledge of the true God). This claim makes Paul's indictment universal—there is not excuse for the human suppression of the truth about God.

(4) 1:21-23: Defines the essence of sin. Glorifying God was thought to be the principal responsibility of any Jew, and this meant acknowledging God as God. The restoration of this is the goal of the Gospel—to transform human being from being God-deniers to God glorifiers. Life which does not take God into account is inevitably drawn into self-degradation and self-destruction. The catalogue in 1:26-32 is not merely a list of vices but a list of symptoms indicating the ways in which creation has been badly distorted by human sin. Quite simply Paul's argument is that when God is not properly acknowledged, the capacity for understanding in human being is disabled.

1:24-32

(1) The theme of this section is difficult to miss. The phrase "God gave them up" occurs three times (1:24, 26 28) and in Greek is sometimes a technical expression for the handing over of a criminal for punishment. Those who choose to suppress the truth about God are required to live out the consequences of desires and patterns of thought which become twisted.

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(2) Paul's argument (which is worked out from 2:1-3:20) places all of humanity essentially on the same level, Jew and pagan, Greek and barbarian. All of humankind is at some level involved in worshiping the creature rather than the Creator (1:25).

(3) Paul's claim is not that every person manifests all the "dishonorable passions" (1:26) in this catalogue but that their presence within the human community demonstrates that humankind is driven by unnatural passions and a debased mind.

NOTES ON ROMANS 2-3

2:1-16

(1) It needs to be remembered that Paul has already made it clear that all people are involved in the suppression of the truth (1:18). The person in view in this section is an example of such suppression: a bigot/hypocrite who either condemns in others what he himself practices or who thinks of immorality as that which other people do. 2:2 makes it clear that the Roman Christians agree with Paul that such a person will be judged by God (echoes of Matthew 7:1-2). This bigot/hypocrite maintains an illusion of moral/religious exceptionalism which leads him to believe that God will judge "other people". 2:3 makes it clear that to truly understand the judgment of God is to see the foolishness of such an exceptionalism.

(2) One of the key consequences of the human suppression of the truth is a lack of true self-knowledge. Our bigot/hypocrite does not know his true state—he is actually presuming upon God's mercy. God's "kindness and forbearance and patience" are not intended to encourage slackness but to allow for repentance, a thing of which our bigot/hypocrite believes he has no need. Some commentators believe that Paul is addressing "self-righteous Jews" at this point but there is no evidence of this yet—his focus still seems to be on all people as "truth suppressors". The complete blindness of the bigot/hypocrite is made clear in 2:5. Thinking himself righteous, he is completely unaware of his true state which is that he has been merely accumulating God's wrath against himself. Note that the gospel does not mean that God's wrath (God's final judgment against sin and evil) has been neutralized.

(3) What purpose does the bigot/hypocrite serve? Rhetorically speaking, Paul is maneuvering his readers into a trap. We are to recognize ourselves in this figure, not to search for some other person or group that Paul might be speaking about. To the extent that we "identify" the bigot/hypocrite with "self-righteous Jews" or pagan moralists, we only prove the point made in 2:4-5.

(4) 2:6-11: 2:6 cites Proverbs 24:12, showing that Paul intends his argument to be scriptural and that he understands his basic premise to be accepted by the Roman Christians: God has no favorites, people whom he especially indulges; neither being Jewish nor being Roman puts one in such a category because such a category does not exist. Those who seek (where seek means a vigorous moral endeavor) "glory and honor and immortality" (a phrase borrowed from Greco-Roman culture) will receive eternal life (cf. 6:22). Those who are "self-seeking," that is those whose lives are driven by disobedience to the truth and obedience to unrighteousness (cf. 6:15-21). Quite simply, there is no escape from God's judgment and no religious identity, ethnic affiliation, social position or status can balance out a life that is governed by the suppression of the truth. All suppressors of the truth, who remain such, will meet the same end: "wrath and fury" (2:8). This will be their end not because God is not "loving" but because God will be God and for those who choose to suppress the truth about

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him God's being God will take the form of judgment. 2:11 states the central premise of the letter: No one can claim exemption from God's tribunal on the basis of some perceived religious, social or ethnic status.

(5) 2:12-16: It is important to recognize that all this is not abstract speculation. There are two groups within the Roman church which do imagine themselves as God's favorites and which are dividing this church. There are Jewish Christians who take the attitude "we were here first" and there are Gentile Christians who have adopted the attitude that "we are God's new favorites". Such a division threatens to undermine Paul's missionary journey to Spain. From 2:12-29 Jewish Christians are in view, for they are "hearers of the law" (2:13). Notice that the emphasis of 2:6-11 is applied concretely to Jewish Christians. Being a "hearer of the law" and attending the synagogue will not exempt one from being judged by the law—what is judged is not one's religious or social affiliations and pretensions (which can actually be stumbling blocks) but the actual shape of one's life. What Paul says here is not in conflict with what he says about living by faith so long as we remember that for him faith is always "the obedience of faith (1:5). It is the doers of the law who will be justified, those who enact obedience within their lives (cf. 8:1-8). The points that Paul will go on to make are that real obedience is not a merely human possibility and that what is needed is the gift of obedience—this is the gift received in faith. The Gentiles of 2:14 are probably Christians (not Gentiles in general); Gentile Christians do what the law requires because they live under grace and grace is not a substitute for obedience but the thing which makes it possible. The lives of such Gentiles make it clear that they obey an internal law (2:15 = Jeremiah 31:31) and this is the sign that they are fully members of God's covenant people. But lest Gentile Christians in Rome allow this to "puff them up" Paul adds in 2:16 the reminder that God has reserved to himself the judgment of all people on the basis of their actual dispositions (as opposed to their professions).

2:17-29

(1) In this section Jewish Christians are clearly (but not exclusively) in view. Here they are put into the role of the bigot/hypocrite not because Paul thinks of all Jews or all Jewish Christians as being such but because he knows that this really does fit the Jewish Christians in Rome. They are pictured as taking to themselves the glory of a religious heritage which they do not seriously live out. The thing Paul seeks to puncture is not "works righteousness" but a cultural superiority. Here the law is not a guide to obedience but a stick to beat those who do not possess it (2:17). The claim here is to know God's will (2:18), to be instructed from the law (2:18) and to be "a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children" (2:19, 20) and yet the reality is that none of these claims is actually lived out. Our bigot/hypocrite uses the law not as a guide to living (and certainly not as a counsel of humility) but as a means of gaining superiority. The concepts of superiority/honor are behind both the Jewish division of the world into Jew (chosen) and Gentile (unchosen) and the Greco-Roman division of the world into Greek (superior) and barbarian (inferior). In the case of the Jewish Christian bigot/hypocrite the wrongness of his whole enterprise is in one phenomenon: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of

you" (2:24 = Isaiah 52:5). In his desire to prove his superiority over the Gentiles he ends up by dishonoring God.

(2) 2:25-29 now picks up on the argument developed in 2:12-16. Does circumcision bestow a cultural superiority upon those who receive it? Paul's answer is clearly "no" especially in the case where the circumcised person does not keep the law, in which case circumcision has become "uncircumcision" (2:25). It is not merely that the failure to live a "circumcised" life negates one's circumcision but that it makes one lawless and alien (for Jews "uncircumcised" described all the worst aspects of Gentile living). There are, on the other hand, Gentiles (Christians) who keep "the precepts of the law" (2:26) and thus show themselves to be truly "circumcised" (in the sense of Jeremiah 31:31). Remember what Paul understands the "precepts of the law" to ultimately be; the person who keeps the law honors God as God (1:21) and does not exchange the truth about God for a lie (1:25). The contrast in 2:25-29 is not between "religion of the heart" and "religion of externals" (this is a modern distinction) but between "the obedience of faith" and the attempt to gain some advantage over others. The person who lives the obedience of faith knows that his praise comes from God and so has no use for status games. The truly "circumcised" person has left the chasing after honor/status and so has no need for thinking "I am more moral than..." "I am more religious than..." "I am more spiritual than..."

3:1-8

(1) In light of 2:25-29 the questions of 3:1 seem natural: Is there any advantage to being a Jew? Does circumcision have any value? If we interpret Paul through the lens of the "religion of the heart/religion of externals" dichotomy, his answer in 3:2 will seem surprising, even absurd. But if we remember that Paul also has Gentile Christians in mind who are claiming that they are God's new favorites, we can see that what he says anticipates 11:13-24; Paul does not wish to merely replace Jewish ethnocentrism and exceptionalism with a spiritually arrogant Gentile Christianity. Paul's answer to the question posed has very much to do with the contempt expressed for Jewish Christians in Rome by Gentile Christians (14:1-15:13).

(2) Being a Jew is not a thing of indifference because Jews were entrusted with "the oracles of God" (3:2), meaning the whole of Scripture (containing the covenant, the messianic promises and the law). What if some Jews were unfaithful in that they refused the messiah sent to them (3:3)? The fact remains that the oracles of God are still true and that Israel was entrusted with them before the Gentiles. Paul cites Psalm 51:4 in 3:4 to make the point that in the "competition" between human truth suppressors and the truth of God, God will win out and prevail. Paul imagines an objection to this view, a final attempt to preserve some status for humankind: If human unrighteousness calls attention to God's righteousness, then God is unjust in judging us. Paul dismisses this in 3:6: it was an article of Jewish faith that God judges the world, and article for which Paul sees reason to argue. Anyone who thinks this way stands justly condemned (3:8).

(3) It is important to note that Paul does not think of wrath (3:5) as the antithesis of God's righteousness but as a dimension of it; if God did not oppose human sin with wrath, he would forsake his loyalty to creation. Paul also does not think of God's wrath as being the antithesis of God's love.

(4) In 1:18-32 Paul has shown how Gentiles suppress the truth about God and the consequences to which this leads. In 3:1-8 Paul shows how Jews resort to evasions and distortions. This leads to the conclusion of his argument in 3:9-19.

3:9-20

(1) With this section Paul comes to his main point: There are no grounds for claims to superiority because "both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9). There can be no exceptionalism because all without exception are sinners.

(2) In 8:10-18 Paul cites a catena of scriptural passages which make his point dramatically. The citations come from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and include Psalm 13:1 + Sirach 7:20, Psalm 13:2, Psalm 13:3, Psalm 139:4, Isaiah 59:7-8, Proverbs 1:16, Psalm 35:2. In 1:18-32 Paul shows that all Gentiles are sinners and he now shows that the same applies to Jews. This testimony from the law (probably understood to mean the whole of Scripture). The result of this catena is that "every mouth" is stopped (3:19), "the whole world" is held accountable to God (3:19) and that "no human being" (3:20) can be justified by human effort. In the face of God's impartial righteousness no human system of exceptionalism can stand.

3:21-26

(1) The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law (in the death and resurrection of Jesus) although the law and the prophets bear witness to this (3:21; cf. 1:2). The theme of God's righteousness has already been introduced in 1:17. God's righteousness refers to his saving activity, God's sovereignty over his creation and the rightful power God uses to restore creation which has fallen away from him. Something of this righteousness is suggested in Psalm 97:7-9. Justification or "setting right" refers not simply to individuals but to the restoration of the whole created order. God's righteousness has been manifested historically in the event of Jesus' death and resurrection. This has taken place apart from the law (3:21), meaning apart from the national and religious boundaries of Israel. Paul's position does not imply a view that Jews believed that they could "earn salvation" by keeping the law. Instead of law defining one's relationship to God, now something else defines this which is "faith in Jesus Christ" (3:22). Because God's righteousness offers a right relationship with God to all on the same basis, all human pretensions are excluded (3:27). Put another way, through faith all have equal access to the righteousness of God in Christ. All human pretensions and claims to being God's favorites must fall before this fact.

(2) 3:23 sums up Paul's contention thus far, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". This means that all human beings have fallen short of the purpose for which they were created and, thus, can only be put right with God by God. Everyone's relationship must be seen not as an individual attainment (reflecting some inherent ability) but as the gift of God.

(3) 3:24-25 are crucial. The righteousness of God is synonymous with Jesus Christ and the Cross; the fact that it is offered to all is part of its inherent scandal. Recalling the Day of Atonement liturgy in Leviticus 16, Paul refers to Christ as *hilasterion*, the same term used in Leviticus 16:13-14 to designate the "mercy seat" or the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant. While the mercy seat provided for the expiation of Israel's sin, the new, final *hilasterion*, Jesus Christ, provides access to atonement for all. In Christ, the atoning work of the Temple has been replaced and made available to all. The work of Christ involves more than forgiveness. In him, all the invidious distinctions among people (Jew vs Gentile, Greek vs barbarian, etc) are overcome (cf. Ephesians 2:11-22) and atonement and divine favor are available "for all who believe" (3:22).

(4) God's righteousness is revealed in the creation of a new means of atonement which is available to all. The form this takes is Jesus's shameful death which destroys human pride and human efforts at falsifying the truth about God.

3:27-31

(1) If all humans are involved in failure before God (3:23) then no one is in a position to boast, to claim special favor with God. 3:28 makes this clear. If our status with God can be determined on the basis of performance, this opens the way for competition, status seeking and claims of attainment. Human beings are set right with God not on the basis of what they do but on the basis of something God does—atonement.

(2) If the sign of being set right with God is obedience to the law, this finally means that God is not the God of Gentiles (3:29). The gospel results in a revolutionary equality among people since both the circumcised and the uncircumcised are set right with God in the same way (3:30). The gospel makes possible an obedience which makes boasting impossible since through it the ability to be obedient come as a gift.

NOTES ON ROMANS 4 and 5

4:1-12

(1) 4:1 can be translated in several ways, the most common way being similar to the RSV: "What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?" This translation does not make sense in light of the point Paul seeks to make, which is that Gentile Christians are Abraham's descendants but not "according to the flesh". An alternative translation makes better sense in this context: "Therefore what shall we say that Abraham our forefather found according to the flesh?" The central point of this whole chapter is that Abraham's relationship to God (his righteousness, his rightness with God) was established not through something he did but through faith.

(2) It is important to remember the question that Paul is attempting to address, the question posed in 3:31: Does the view that we are put right with God through faith rather than through obedience to the law contradict the law (law here having the meaning of "Scripture")? By demonstrating that Abraham, the "founding father of Israel," first entered into a right relationship with God through faith, Paul can argue that Gentile Christians are legitimately his descendants and are not "second class citizens" within the covenant.

(3) Paul is dealing with a very important theological issue here. If God began with the law and then somehow decided to replace it with faith, God would appear to be inconsistent and unreliable (What standard might God adopt next?). Paul wishes to show not only the consistency of the Gospel with "the holy Scriptures" (1:2) but also the consistency of God. What God intended all along is revealed in Abraham with the law coming later as a temporary measure (cf. Galatians 3:15-29). Part of God's faithfulness is his complete consistency. Faith has always been God's ultimate goal for the way in which his people are to be related to him.

(4) If Abraham's relationship with God was established on the basis of something he did (even his own act of belief!) then he has something about which he can "boast" (4:2). And if this is the case, Abraham becomes an example of the exceptionalism which Paul denounces in 1-3. If Abraham (or any one else) has deserved a status of righteousness before God then it is not true that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:23-24) and grace becomes God's mercy to the "weak" who somehow can not "get their act together". Thus, for Paul Abraham is neither an example of a noble man whose righteousness is acknowledged by God nor an example of a man who is reckoned as righteous on the basis of his act of faith—if either is the case Abraham has something about which to boast (his obedience or his faith).

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(5) At the center of this chapter is Genesis 15:6. Abraham is an old man whose wife is infertile (Genesis 18:11) and God promises him that his descendants shall be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). Abraham's response is reported in 15:6: "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness". As in Psalm 24:1-5, being accounted righteous means being declared acceptable to God, worthy to enter into God's presence.. Message to the competing factions in Rome: Righteousness is the gift of a new relationship with God which precludes claims of exceptionalism and ends religious competition.

(6) 4:4 poses the issue clearly. If a person has performed some type of work (rendered some type of service) then this person has earned his wage and deserves payment. Put another way: Do human "good deeds" somehow put God in our obligation? 4:5 is a summary interpretation of Abraham which utterly denies such a possibility. Abraham does no "work" and performs no "service" so as to create some type of divine "obligation"; he simply trusts God who "justifies the ungodly" (4:5). The concept of "ungodliness" first appeared in 1:18 where it means not atheism (because the term is applied to pagans) but the rejection of God as God. The emphasis falls completely on God's action, the action of deeming the unworthy to be worthy of entering into God's presence. Strictly speaking, Abraham is not an example of "justification by faith" (because this implies that he brings something—faith—into the equation) but of justification by the righteousness of God.

(7) 4:7-8 is a citation of the Greek text of Psalm 32:1-2. This Psalm was used on the Day of Atonement. Its citation here serves to recall 3:24-25 where Paul has explicitly referred to the Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement liturgy in relation to Jesus' death. God's acceptance of the unworthy does not come about after God has a change of heart (once again, this would make God inconsistent) but after God, while remaining righteous, enacts a "Day of Atonement" or all humankind. Faith does not create atonement but only receives it.

(8) 4:9-10 make a crucial point, a point necessary to Paul's case that Abraham is the father of all who believe (Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians). Abraham's relationship with God as "righteousness" comes before he is circumcised and, indeed, before there is a law. The point is that in Christ God has not changed his mind about how he wants his human creatures to relate to him. Faith is not "Plan B" which was brought out and dusted off when the more difficult way of law failed. Faith is not an accommodation to those who are "weak"; it is not "law light". The true relationship between law and faith is suggested by Jesus in a hyperbolic way: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

(9) 4:11-12 make it clear that both Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians have Abraham as their common ancestor and for this reason the current game between them of "one-upmanship" between them is pointless. Abraham is "the father of all who believe without being circumcised" (4:11) and "the father of the circumcised...who walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (4:12). Paul wants the competing factions to see their identities in a new

way. They are not to see things in terms of the “strong and the “weak” (the Gentile Christian view with themselves as the “strong”) or in terms of God’s first covenant people and Abraham’s real descendants (the Jewish Christian view) but they are to see themselves as members of God’s one covenant people and as participants in the one covenant made with Abraham: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28-29).

4:13-25

(1) 4:13 moves to the real focus of this chapter which is not Abraham’s faith but God’s promise—Israel and then the Church are constituted not by the faith of individuals but by the promise of God. This verse also recalls the scope of the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2, 3: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” What is in view here is not simply the conversion of individuals but the creation of a new social order, an order which Paul will refer to in 8:18-25—in the Church the promise of blessing to all people through Abraham is coming true. If the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham is restricted to those keeping the law, then it simply can not be kept because the Gentile world is *a priori* excluded. Of course, as Paul has already noted in 2:17-24, Israel has failed to keep the law so that the divine promise can not be fulfilled for her either. If the fulfillment of the promise, of God’s purpose, is contingent upon human performance then humankind holds its future in its own hands—the fulfillment of the promise would no longer reside in God.

(2) If the promise of God is contingent upon human effort (whether it be the effort of keeping the law or the effort of believing), then there can be no guarantee of its being fulfilled. In Paul’s radical theology the promise is guaranteed “to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham” (4:16). Note that the divine guarantee encompasses both Jews (“the adherent of the law”) and Christians (“the one who shares the faith of Abraham”). The promise can be guaranteed precisely because its fulfillment is contingent upon God’s righteousness. In other words, the promise is not fulfilled when the human race “gets its act together” but, rather, God creates an obedient people for himself and this creation fulfills the promise.

(3) In 4:17 Paul returns to the story of Abraham, this time focusing on Genesis 17:5 where God says to Abraham “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” Paul is quoting from the Septuagint which translates the Hebrew word *goyim* (“nations”) as *ethn_n*. Both words can mean “Gentiles”. It is here that Paul’s understanding of faith begins to emerge in some detail. It is important to note what Paul emphasizes. Abraham finds himself “in the presence of God” (4:17), the God “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (4:17). The clear emphasis is on God’s

power and God's ability to bring the creation out of nothing and to create Israel out of nothing (an old man and an infertile woman). As 4:18-19 indicate, the object of Abraham's faith is the fulfillment of the divine promise which appears to be an impossibility but which Abraham accepts on the basis of God's credibility.

(4) But Abraham is not reckoned righteous because he was able to summon up a strong faith. 4:20 is crucial. It is not Abraham who summons up faith within himself to accept the promise but it is rather the promise which evokes faith in Abraham. Robert Jewett translates 4:20 like this: "Yet with regard to the promise of God, no doubt made him waver in unfaith, but he was empowered in his faith, giving glory to God." Paul's point is that Abraham did not bring obedience to the law into his relationship with God nor did he bring a capacity for faith into the relationship. Instead, God evoked faith in Abraham through his own sovereign promise and, thus, Abraham trusts in God's faithfulness and doing so he "gave glory to God" (4:20). Note how different this is from the way of sin in which people "although they knew God, they did not honor him as God" (1:21). Here we see the essence of faith, the giving of glory to God by honoring him as God. But this is something which only God's promise can evoke. Therefore, not even faith counts as a qualification for righteousness. God not only offers Abraham a promise, he also offers Abraham the faith by which the promise is received.

(5) 4:23-24 introduces a theme which will be taken up again in 15:4, that what was written of Abraham (in Scripture) does not only concern him but intentionally serves as a type of something to come—the inclusion of Gentiles into the covenant. 4:24-25 makes it clear that righteousness is counted to the one who not simply believes in the resurrection but in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus was "delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:25). The first part of this statement seems to refer back to Jesus as the place of atonement (3:24-25) while the second indicates that the resurrection demonstrates the validity of the gospel; in the death of Jesus there is grace for all without qualification.

5:1-11

(1) Through Jesus death we have peace with God. Here peace is not to be understood as a feeling but as an actual relationship, one which flows from reconciliation. This peace is not a human accomplishment but comes only "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). The full meaning of peace only becomes clear in light of 5:10.

(2) Access (5:2) is a key word and refers to access to God or access to the emperor. In either case one needed something to gain it; holiness in the case of God and clout in the case of the emperor. Jesus' death has provided access to all without regard to performance or status. Such access renders competition nonsensical because it is available to all. This access now opens up the "hope of the glory of God. Note that in 3:23 Paul says that we have fallen short of the glory of God. Grace restores us to the purposes of God.

(3) The treatment of suffering in 5:3 would have struck a Greco-Roman audience as odd since the emphasis was on speaking of victory and triumph. Further still, it was understood that certain people of great virtue might use afflictions to improve themselves but this is not what Paul emphasizes. The positive qualities produced by afflictions (endurance, character, hope) appear to be produced not by human virtue but by divine grace. Thus, while in this culture one would expect Paul to talk about rejoicing in virtues he actually speaks about rejoicing in suffering. It needs to be noted that Paul is not talking about suffering in general but suffering experienced within and because of Christian commitment. This brings about a dramatic shift in perspective in that the emphasis is no longer upon the supposed attainments or status of a group or of an individual but upon God and what God may be trusted to do. This creates a very different way of viewing the future.

(4) The love of God, as Paul will make clear in 5:8, is manifested in the death of Christ but God's love is not something which is to be known merely as a historical fact or theological concept. The love revealed on the cross is available to and present in Christians through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's presence has the effect of erasing distinctions of ethnicity and social status because it is the ultimate honor—the very presence and love of the Creator. In Christ and through the Holy Spirit adversity has lost its power to shame and grind down.

(5) 5:6-8: Paul makes it clear that Christ died for “the ungodly” (literally: “for the sake of the godless”). The word has been used before in 4:5 and it is fairly clear that Paul intends it to apply to everyone. To be godless is not to be an atheist, one who explicitly denies the existence of God, but to refuse to recognize God as God, a state which can be accompanied by all kinds of “religion”. The status of human beings as godless is precisely why grace is necessary. 5:7 is probably supposed to be a parenthetical comment. 5:7a interjects the comment that dying for a righteous person is almost unknown while 5:7b notes that there have been heroes who gave themselves up for worthy people or causes. The point being made is that dying on behalf of the godless, the unrighteous and the shamed is simply unheard of and goes against all human standards and yet this is precisely what Jesus did. The fact is stated in 5:8. The contrast between 5:7 and 5:8 implies an entire theology, one in which the radical difference between God and human beings is made clear. In contrast to the Greco-Roman ideal for which the hero dies on behalf of the honored city-state or Rome, Jesus died on behalf of sinners, those without claim to honor and we have already seen that the category “sinner” includes all of humankind (3:23).

(6) 5:9-11: 5:9-10 contains two “how much more” arguments, arguments which move from an already established premise to a new conclusion. If God reacts to “godless sinners” by justifying them through Christ's blood (5:9), then how much more can we say that, having been so justified, these same sinners will be saved from God's wrath. Wrath, God's eschatological judgment, has already been mentioned in 1:18 and 2:8 and it is important to remember that it is not God getting especially mad but wrath is the mode in which those who do not accept God's grace must experience God. God will finally be experienced as either grace or wrath but it is the same God who is experienced in each case, not God in a “nice” or “mean” mode. 5:10 puts the matter dramatically. If

God responds to his enemies by reconciling them to himself through the death of Jesus, how much more will these graciously treated enemies be saved. The emphasis of both these arguments is the sovereignty of God in human salvation. Paul will come to the question of human responsibility, but for now the emphasis is on the certainty of God completing what he has begun. If the death of Jesus makes it clear that God's unmerited grace is available to all through the new atonement in Christ, the resurrection of Jesus is God's promise that what he has begun will in fact be completed because in Christ it already is. If it is God's promise which awakens and sustains faith and if it is God who sees salvation to its completion, then all grounds for human pride and boasting are totally overthrown. Paul is not encouraging irresponsibility as will become clear. Christ's death establishes a whole new social dynamic, not simply a new piety. When the focus shifts from our attempts to justify ourselves, to make ourselves look righteous and to claim status for ourselves to the fact that we have been reconciled to God at his initiative and by his grace, then we cease to claim things for ourselves and begin to "rejoice in God" (5:11). Cf. Ephesians 2:11-22.

5:12-21

(1) The purpose of this section is to make a crucial point: The abundance of divine grace overwhelms human sinfulness. To those who wonder whether can "pull off" the business of human salvation, Paul says that we must remember that God is the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17). Paul now presents two very different human types and destinies, the types of Adam (Hebrew=human being) and Christ and the destinies of death and eternal life.

(2) 5:12-14: There are many unanswered questions here but the point is clear: Sin entered the world through a human being and it now manifests itself in the lives of all human beings (5:12). While Paul's clearly thinking of the events of Genesis 3, his purpose is not to tell us how sin was passed from Adam to his descendants or even how Adam came to sin but to make it clear that sin came into creation not through an act of God but through a human act—in short sin really does not belong to the created order. 5:13 is probably intended to be a parenthetical comment about the nature of sin. If sin preceded the law, then Adam's sin was not simply a violation of the law but something much deeper and sin must infect, as Paul has argued in Romans 3, even those who keep the law. Paul has said that death is the consequence of sin (5:12) and that where there is no law there is no transgression. In 5:14 he pauses to briefly address the question "Does this mean that death only entered in when the law was given because only after it was given were transgressions counted? Paul is making a distinction between transgression and sin. From Adam to Moses death exercised a coercive power like that of a monarch so sin affects every person even where it is not counted as a transgression of the law. This verse closes with the important statement that Adam "was a type of the one who was to come". The word "type" usually means something which prefigures something else which comes later but here Paul seems to think of Adam as being analogous to Christ in the sense that both determine the fate or destiny of their subjects (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45-47).

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(3) 5:15-17: The analogy just mentioned is now developed in some detail with a view to clarifying the scope and nature of what God has done in Christ. The main purpose of the analogy is to show that the scope of God's redeeming work in Christ is co-extensive with the disastrous consequences of Adam's sin and that what happened in Adam is reversed in Christ. The point is not that grace is proportionate to human sin but that grace overwhelms human sin; grace did not merely come to correct sin but it "abounded for many" (5:15). 5:16 highlights the different consequences of being "in Adam" and being "in Christ". The way opened up by Adam leads to "condemnation" while the way opened up by Christ leads to "justification". 5:17 also highlights the difference of consequences. In Adam death reigns over all (5:14); it has become the human destiny. In Christ a new destiny is introduced by grace which is "the free gift of righteousness" which leads to "life". What God has done in Christ is not introduced a new religion into the world but has started the human race all over and assigned it a new destiny. This contrast is important in that what human beings earn is death but what they are given by God is life.

(4) 5:18-21: This section continues to focus on the contrast between Adam and Christ. As in 5:15, 5:18 characterizes Adam's essential act as "trespass". But Christ's essential act is characterized as an "act of righteousness". We can now see clearly how the two contrast in terms of both character and destiny. Adam embodies "disobedience" (5:19) while Christ embodies "obedience" (5:19). In Adam the many were made "sinners" (5:19) while in Christ the many are made "righteous" (5:19). The obedience of Christ is very important in that through him comes "the obedience of faith" (1:5). The world is now characterized by two competing reigns, the reign of sin in death and the reign of Christ in righteousness. Sin is incompatible with grace and through faith we enter not into a new set of religious ideas but into a new sovereignty. With this in place, Paul is now prepared to launch into chapter 6.

NOTES ON ROMANS 6-7

6:1-14

(1) Question: Does Paul's understanding of our relationship with God as being based upon the gifts of faith and obedience, gifts granted apart from the law, lead to immorality or to "cheap grace"? Paul has already indicated that his gospel has been radically misunderstood in 3:8: "And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just." And when Paul says "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (5:20) his is open to being misunderstood to mean that what we do is not important because no matter how much we sin there is always grace. Chapter 6 sets out to clear away misconceptions: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound. By no means!" (6:1). Misconceptions about faith and salvation usually stem from an insufficiently radical understanding of God's action in Jesus Christ.

(2) Note the radical thesis in 6:2: Christians are not simply people who have taken it upon themselves to avoid sin and to do good deeds. Nor are they simply people who feel especially bad when they sin and earnestly want to repent of it. Why is grace incompatible with sin? Because Christians have died to sin and so therefore no longer live in it. Paul has already had much to say about death. Christ's death (3:24-25; 4:24-25; 5:6-11) is dwelt upon then Paul focuses on Adam's death (5:12-21). The relationship between the two is complex but it is clear that the death of Christ reverses the death of Adam and changes the human situation fundamentally. It is important to notice when reading Romans 6 that Paul does not think of sin merely as discrete immoral acts; we do not sin but we are "under sin" (3:9) and "sin reigned in death" (5:21). Salvation and faith have to do not with a mere shift of opinion (from not believing to believing in God) but with a shift in sovereignties, from the reign of sin to the reign of grace (5:21). In Colossians 1:13-14 Paul can summarize God's saving work like this: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

(3) 6:2 makes it clear that the death to sin envisioned is an event in the definite past. There was a point at which each Christian died to sin and that point is baptism. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (6:3). This question reflects Paul's presupposition that this is a statement which the Roman Christians already believe. Paul is probably building here on an early Christian theology of baptism for which baptism was not simply the application of water to a body but was baptism "into Christ Jesus" (6:3; cf. Galatians 3:27). Baptism meant being transferred into the sphere of Christ's sovereignty and is connected with the events by which that sovereignty has come about—Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. 6:4 extends this by moving from the early Christian notion of baptism to the way in which it was practiced—immersion. Immersion in the water of baptism dramatically signifies being "buried therefore with him" (6:4). The whole meaning of baptism is for Paul tied to an eschatological reality, that Christ "was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (6:4); in

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Christ's death and resurrection God has ushered in the new age, the time of salvation, which now co-exists with the old age (now passing away); baptism ushers the baptized person into this age, the sphere of Christ's sovereignty. Baptism, therefore, is a kind of death, a death to the old age, a death to sin.

(4) While Christ's life "ended" on the cross he received an entirely new type of life in the resurrection; through baptism Christians also share in Jesus' resurrection and so also enter into a new type of life (6:5). For Christ, death and resurrection are completed realities (6:9-10) but for Christians only the death is complete; the new resurrected life will be consummated in the future (6:5): "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." While the fullness of the resurrected life is not present for us, something has radically changed for we now "walk in newness of life" (6:4).

(5) 6:6-7 returns to specify the meaning of baptismal death. The old self, the old man/woman (who we are in and with Adam as sinners) is "crucified" with Christ as so "brought to nothing" (6:6). Being a Christian does not simply mean "believing in Christ" but, rather, means being completely identified with him, sharing in his death so that "we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (3:6). Note that for Paul faith and baptism are not two separate things. Because faith means baptism "into Christ Jesus," it also means the beginning of the destruction of the sinful nature and its replacement by a new one. The Christian life is a life being freed from the deadly grip of sin and being turned over to the life-giving sovereignty of God: Immortality constitutes a denial of this type of life.

(6) Note that 6:8 returns to the pattern of 6:5 with the baptismal dying indicated as a completed fact and resurrection to new life indicated as a future reality. 6:9 provides us some insight into the nature of resurrection. Christ was not raised into ordinary life but into a life beyond death, a life beyond the sovereignty of sin/death. It appears that Paul is cautious here so as to reject any notion that we now share fully in the resurrected life. We have died to sin (it is no longer our master) and the resurrected life is now the determining reality of who we are but it is not present in its completeness.

(7) 6:10 is crucial; the pattern of Christ defines the meaning of baptism and the meaning of the Christian life. The death Jesus died is a death "to sin" and a death "once for all" but his resurrection involves now lived exclusively to God. This is precisely what it means to be a Christian, to have died to sin and to be living into a pattern of life dedicated exclusively to God. In his death and resurrection Jesus was completely dependent upon and obedient to God. C.K. Barrett's comment on this section is helpful: "It is also of course clear that Christians do not live a sinless and immortal life in heaven with Christ. Faith and baptism do not in this life effect their own full meaning. In particular, they leave room for ethical effort, in which Christians endeavor actually to achieve (with the aid of the Spirit, given in baptism) the life to which baptism points." This is the note on which this section concludes: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11).

6:15-23

(1) Having shown that sin and grace are opposites, Paul now returns to his question and poses it in a slightly different way: Does the fact that Christians do not live under the law mean that they are free to sin? Does living under grace simply mean that we have a license to do what we want? The answer, as in 6:1 is a very strong negative: Absolutely not! The purpose of this section is to show that grace has its own form of obedience—the “obedience of faith” (1:5).

(2) To make this point Paul draws on an analogy which has the dual advantage of being rooted in the everyday experience of the Roman Christians and fits the thesis of 3:9 that all people are “under sin,” that they live under obedience to sin which is a form of slavery.

(3) 6:16 refers to the common practice of people selling themselves into slavery, a practice which while depriving a person of his or her freedom guaranteed the individual a living. In Paul's analogy there are only two potential masters, sin and obedience (6:16). All of us have yielded to the “ownership” of one. Note how Paul's way of identifying himself in 1:1 as a “slave of Jesus Christ” has prepared the way for this analogy. As we have seen in 5:12-21 obedient service given to these two masters yields two very different kinds of “reward”.

(4) 6:17-19 describes the transition that Paul can assume that the Roman Christians have made. They were once “slaves of sin” but, through grace, have become “obedient from the heart” to “the standard of teaching” which is the Christian faith (note that Paul feels no need to specify what this is; he assumes that the Romans Christians already know it). They have “been set free from sin” and have become not free agents but “slaves of righteousness”. The Christian does live without the law but the Christian life is not a matter of living under one's own authority or being free to satisfy one's own desires (indeed, both these states are sin) but a matter of living under the mastery of righteousness. Paul acknowledges in 6:18 that this is an analogy for the sake of making a point;; faith is not a form of slavery.

(5) 6:19 provides us with some insight into the role of human effort in the life of grace. Such an exhortation presupposes at least one thing: that because of grace it can be put into practice. Paul does not think of grace as destroying responsibility either in terms of it working in us like a medicine (we are merely passive) or in terms of it working as an excuse for us not being obedient (since God is so forgiving we do not need to bother all that much about him). We can yield ourselves “as slaves to impurity” or we can yield ourselves “as slaves to righteousness”; the former is sin, the latter is the way of grace.

(6) To complete the analogy, Paul draws on the fact that people sold themselves into slavery to gain a living. The way of sin leads to death (meaning more than mere biological extinction) and the way of grace leads to sanctification and eternal life. Note the slight bending of the analogy in 6:23. Sin

pays wages (giving us what we have earned) and the wages paid come to death. But grace does not pay wages (because it involves us getting what we have not earned) and this is "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord".

Excursus: Baptism And the Christian Life

(1) For Paul, baptism and the Christian life are organically connected. We can see this in the fact that Paul never writes about baptism as an independent topic but he always brings it in to emphasize some dimension of the Christian life.

(2) I Corinthians 6:9-11: transformation

(3) 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: incorporation into Christ's body.

(4) Colossians 2:8-15: death and resurrection

(5) Galatians 3:26-29: the new humanity

7:1-6

(1) This section answers an important question: "Why are not Christians under the law?" Note that there are a variety of possible answers to this question, almost all of them disastrous from Paul's viewpoint. Christians could be free from the law simply because they want to be, because God has decided that the law was a bad idea after all, because God has changed his mind about how salvation is to occur or because the law is simply a defective thing. It is important to note that Paul strongly rejects all of these possibilities.

(2) To make his point, Paul makes use of another analogy, that of marriage. When a woman's husband dies, she is no longer that man's wife; her status with respect to the law of marriage has now changed. Her status changes not because she has decided to leave her husband or because she has taken a dislike to the institution of marriage or because marriage has somehow been abolished—her status changes because the thing that defined her relationship to the law of marriage is now absent (her husband). The death of the husband makes the wife "free from the law" (7:3).

(3) In the case of Christians a death has also changed our relationship to the law, "you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another...in order that you may bear fruit for God" (6:4). The "body of Christ" here probably refers to Christ's physical body on the cross (cf. Ephesians 2:16). Christ's death changes our relationship to the law and establishes our relationship with God on another basis. Notice that this changed status is not "being on our own" but that of belonging "to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that you may bear fruit for God". We are free from the law not because we determined a need to escape from it

but because God has changed our relationship to it through Christ; we do not serve “under the old written code” but we serve “in the new life of the Spirit” (7:6).

7:7-25

(1) Two issues dominate this section. One issue, as Paul makes clear in 7:7) is the question of the character of the law. From Paul has said thus far, some might conclude (and many did conclude) that the law is somehow evil or at least defective. Such a view is unthinkable for Paul and it may actually have been held by some Gentile Christians since such a view would reinforce their own status claims (the move from old covenant to new is the movement from a defective religion to a perfect one). Note that Paul's answer to this question is the same as his answer to the question of whether living under grace means that we are free to do what we please—“By no means!” (7:7; cf. 6:1-2, 15). The law of God defective or evil? Unthinkable! The second issue is that of whether this section is intended to be autobiographical, Paul reporting to us his own inner struggles. This seems unlikely. Based on what Paul tells us about himself in Philippians 3:6 where he says that he was “blameless” with respect to the law, it is difficult to see Paul as an example of the “tortured conscience”. Paul's religious life prior to his conversion seems to have been marked by absolute certainty about his beliefs and his mission. While Paul may be speaking from personal experience here, it is highly likely that he is speaking as “Everyman” not merely reporting about events in his inner life.

(2) The aim of 7:7-25 is to make the case that while the law is “holy and righteous and good” (7:12) there is a connection between sin and the law but this connection is due not to a defect in the law but to the power of sin and to our weakness. One way to see this section is as a compressed interpretation of Genesis 1-3. Note that when Paul begins to build his case he begins with the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17) but only in part: “You shall not covet/desire” (7:7). Since only one commandment is mentioned, it is quite possible that Paul is thinking of the first commandment the primal commandment of Genesis 2:17: “but of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”. Here commandment places limitations on human beings, revealing them to be creatures and not the Creator. And this commandment certainly “promised life” (7:10) in that it forbade an action which could only cause harm. But how was it that is “proved to be death” (7:10)? 7:11 provides the answer: Sin used the opportunity of the commandment to deceive. The great act of deception occurs in Genesis 3:4-5 where the serpent assures the woman that not only will the consequences spelled out by God not occur but also that God's motives for disallowing her access to the tree are far from pure. The serpent's suggestion is the essence of sin, the suggestion that there is finally no difference between us and God that eating a piece of fruit (or using some new technology!) can't resolve. If, as Paul suggests, the essence of commandment is “Don't desire, obey!” then the essence of sin is “Desire, you need not obey!”. In this light, note the woman's reason for finally eating of the forbidden fruit: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit...” (Genesis 3:6). Sin is the

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victory of desire over obedience. In the case of Genesis 1-3 sin used God's commandment to insinuate itself into the life of the man and the woman so that the commandment is twisted to a very different use—instead of forbidding sin it now functions to suggest it.

(3) As it turns out, Paul's defense of the law is actually an argument for the coercive power of sin. Did the good law bring about that which was evil? By no means! (7:13). The problem lies not with the law but with the agents to whom the law was given. The law forbids sin and labels sin as sin (7:13) but the problem is that it is one thing to forbid sin and quite another to resist it. Put a different way, knowing the right does not mean doing it.

(4) 7:13-25 is not a confession of an agonized conscience or the report of a neurotic. It is, in fact, an honest description of the Christian life in this world, a life which involves continual struggle. On one hand, because of grace, Christians find their minds being renewed (12:1-2) and to this extent they "delight in the law of God" (7:21) yet, on the other hand, while we have died to sin its influence is still felt in our lives so that we see in our "members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making it captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (7:23). The whisper of sin "Desire, don't obey!" is something more than a whisper; it can become a compelling force.

(5) What Paul offers is a realistic picture of the Christian life. There is a part of us that has been renewed through grace, the part that Paul calls the "spiritual" part (7:14), though this does not mean something simply opposed to the physical. This part, the "inner being" (7:22) seeks to be obedient like Abraham and delights in the law of God (7:22). Another part of us, which Paul calls "the flesh" (7:14), by which he does not simply mean body, is still yielded to the law of sin. The conflict of these two is part of the life of every Christian, reminding us at once both that the work of God within us to renew and save us is in fact real (hence the resistance!) and that the reality of sin remains in our lives so we can not claim to be examples of redemption completed. This means that hope (5:1-5) is an essential virtue for Christians and we are continually turned away from ourselves to the sure source of our deliverance: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:25).

NOTES ON ROMANS 8-11

8:1-11

(1) With this section, we return the theme articulated in 7:1-6 but then set aside in order to address the question the law's relationship to sin and to vindicate the law as "holy and righteous and good" (7:12) in 7:7-25. In 7:6 Paul begins to make the point that the reason Christians do not live under the law of Moses is not because the law is bad or because God has decided to bring in a more "liberal" regime. Christians live under a new law: "But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we might serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (7:6).

(2) The affirmation that there "is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1) builds upon the argument of chapters 5-6. The important word "condemnation" (meaning God's judgment) was first introduced in 5:16 where its opposite is "justification"; the sin of Adam leads to condemnation (God's wrath) while the grace of God in Christ leads to justification (being put "in the right" with God). 5:1-2 also defines the meaning of these two terms as a thesis statement: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Condemnation is the consequence of being God's "enemies" (5:10) while being a peace with God and being restored to the hope of sharing in God's glory is the consequence of justification. This change has been brought about through sharing in Christ's death and resurrection in baptism (chapter 6) in that by being baptized into Christ's death and resurrection "we know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (6:6). Christians have passed with Christ into the new creation that God is bringing about and one sign of this is the gift of the Spirit.

(3) 8:2 is crucial. "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." The contrast between these two "laws" was made in 5:20-21. In 7:6 the former is further characterized as "the new life of the Spirit". It needs to be kept in mind that the Spirit here is the Spirit of God, the creative and ruling power of God himself, now a work in Christians. The old law, the law of Moses, weakened by sin, is now replaced by God himself against whom sin stands no chance.

(4) 8:3-5: This is an important section because it focuses on God's work in Christ. We have already seen two very compressed statements in this regard in 3:24-25 and 4:24-25. 3:3 emphasizes that what has taken place in Christ has been effected by God. Christ was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (8:3). This means that Christ was sent (from God) and took upon himself the fallen existence of humankind; in this case "likeness" does not mean "appearance" but indicates that Christ did not take upon himself a nature different from our own; Jesus' obedience was not due to his being a

“super man”. Christ takes on the “likeness of sinful flesh” because the work of redemption must take place within the fallen realm of human life not within some “spiritual” realm. God’s work of redemption did not take place “once upon a time” or “long ago in a galaxy far away” but within the midst of fallen human history. Jesus enters fully into our fallen situation but instead of following the pattern of Adam he establishes a new pattern of his own—that of obedience (5:19). Christ was sent “for sin” (5:3) or “to deal with sin”. This probably refers back to 3:25 which in turn refers back to Leviticus 16 and the “mercy seat” on the ark of the covenant. What took place on the cross was an act of eschatological judgment in that God “condemned sin in the flesh [of his Son]”. Notice that what is condemned is sin not sinners and this condemnation took place so that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (5:4), that is, so that the law’s requirement that we be righteous might be fulfilled. Notice that the purpose of the law is not bypassed but fulfilled. The role of the Spirit is not merely to supply some inspiration. 8:5 might be translated like this: “Those whose lives are determined by the flesh set their minds on the affairs of the flesh, whole those whose lives are determined by the Spirit set their minds on the affairs of the Spirit.” To be “determined by the flesh” is to have a perspective limited by the visible world while to be “determined by the Spirit” is to look beyond the world.

(5) In 5:12-21 Paul establishes a radical distinction between life “in Adam” and life “in Christ”, the former being under the reign of death and the latter being under the reign of grace (5:21). He now establishes an analogous distinction between life “according to the flesh” and life “according to the Spirit”. The two forms of life are distinguished by their fundamental motivations. Life according to the flesh is motivated by a fundamental hostility to God (as God really is). Life according to the flesh can be perfectly consistent with “religion”—the person who lives according to the flesh is not necessarily an atheist or an agnostic (it is doubtful that Paul knew any such people). By contrast, life according to the Spirit is motivated by the desire to please God.

(6) 8:9 comes back to the point made in chapter 6—those who are “in Christ” are not simply under the power of sin (6:6), or, to use Paul’s alternative terminology, they are “not in the flesh but in the Spirit”. The reason why those in Christ do not live according to the flesh is not because they have a stronger moral fiber but because the Spirit dwells within them. Within the context of 8:9 Paul can refer to the Spirit as the “Spirit of God” and to the “Spirit of Christ”. Working this out did eventually require Trinitarian theology but Paul’s point here is fairly clear. The Spirit is indeed the Spirit of God; the work of the Spirit is the work of God. But the Spirit is also closely associated with Christ in that only those who are “in Christ” receive the Spirit; Christ’s death and resurrection makes the gift of the Spirit possible. The transforming power of the Spirit is made clear when he is identified as “the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (8:11). Here the Spirit is understood to be the agent of resurrection and effects a resurrection in those who by virtue of being in Christ receive him as well. 8:1-11 repeats the point made in 6:9-11 but within a more fully Trinitarian framework.

8:12-30

(1) 8:12-17: The Christian life is not simply complete with conversion and baptism/gift of the Spirit. Choices must be made, choices which must always be made anew. There must be a continuous decision to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh (8:12-13). Paul brings in yet another analogy to explain what justification means. If living under the dominion of sin means being an “enemy” of God (5:10), then living under grace means being an adopted child of God (8:15-16). The status of being an adopted child of God is not subjective in nature, not a matter of how we regard ourselves but a matter which is objectively determined by the gift of the Spirit: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (8:16). The gift of the Spirit is the sign that God fully intends to complete what he has begun in Christ. The analogy is helpful because it allow Paul to draw on the fact that children are legitimate heirs of their father’s estate so the work of the Spirit points forward to a state of completion. Having been made children of God we are certain of the fact that we will in fact “inherit” what God has promised. But this status is completely dependant upon our being in Christ for we are “fellow heirs with Christ” (8:19).

(2) 8:17 introduces the section that follows by bringing up the issue of suffering (it has been implied all along in the talk of Jesus’ death and was first brought up in 5:1-5).

(3) 8:18 only makes sense in light of the resurrection of Christ; apart from this it is simply a statement of a wish. Christ’s sufferings led to his resurrection and his glorification and the same holds good for those in Christ. Earthly sufferings (of which there are plenty according to Paul (cf. II Corinthians 4:16-5:10; 6:1-10) pale in comparison with the fulfillment of God’s designs. The full scope of these designs now becomes clear. God aims not simply at the redemption of individual lives but at the redemption of the entire created order. It is here that the role of the Church becomes most clear. In 8:19 and 8:21 a connection is made between the “sons of God” (8:19) or the “children of God” (8:21) and the future of creation making it clear that the two are organically connected and that destiny of the former reveals the destiny of the latter. In brief, the passage of God’s children from death to life reveals that creation itself will undergo a similar transformation, one from “bondage to decay” to “the freedom of the glory of the children of God”. The current state of Christians is paralleled by the current state of creation. While set free from sin, Christians continue to sin. While adopted by God, Christians await to receive their inheritance. There is the reality of the “already” and the “not yet” and this is why hope is absolutely essential (8:5). Creation is “in the pains of childbirth” in that it is now in the throes of suffering but the point of this suffering has not yet been made fully clear (the birth of new life as a result of labor). In light of the cross, we see things in a new perspective. What we see is not a creation in its last gasps of life (though sometimes this appears to be the case) but a new creation in the process of birth. The trajectory of creation has been set by Christ and the created order is destined for resurrection. This time before God’s design is complete will be a time of suffering and anguish, a time when even those who have the gift of the Spirit will “groan inwardly” (8:23).

(4) The Church is that community which lives in the hope of the completion of God's work and which recognizes that our salvation is not yet complete. The Christian life requires an essential virtue, that of patience (8:25).

(5) 8:26-30: But even in the midst of suffering we have consolation and a sign that the world will not always be as it is. Paul makes use of one very basic example of consolation—prayer. Here prayer is not first or fundamentally a human act or possibility but rests on something more fundamental, the fact that “the Spirit himself intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (8:27). Prayer is a possibility not because we know the right words or have the right thoughts (we actually don't) but because through the Spirit we have communion with God himself. This work of the Spirit points to the final security of those who belong to God. 8:28 is a doctrine of providence. For those who love God, that is for those “called according to his purpose” (since we can not love God unless he enables us to do so) God works through all things for their good, the final realization of his purposes. The hope of the Church rests on God's predestined designs such that the make-up and course of the Church through history are not simply contingent upon human choice. The role of predestination is to make clear that the existence, continuity and consummation of the people of God (from Abraham to Christ to glory) are finally a matter's of God's sovereign grace. Put another way, the people of God is not made up of those who have decided to become Christians but is made up of those whom God has graciously called. The point made by predestination is that both the faith of individuals and the continued existence of the Church are both made possible by God. Note that the theme of glory reappears in 8:30 picking up on 5:2.

8:31-39

(1) The argument which began in chapter 1 is now being drawn to a conclusion: “What then shall we say to these things?” (8:31). What conclusion can be drawn from the gospel as Paul has thus far presented it? The answer to this question is contained in a highly compressed form in the rhetorical question “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Note that this is another way of stating the “gospel of God” (1:1). The gospel is not primarily good news about us but about God and that news is that God has placed himself unreservedly “on our side”. If it is the Creator God who is the source of our salvation and the ground of our hope, what is there to be feared? 8:32 refers back to 5:6-11 and even further back to Genesis 22:12, 16, the story of the binding of Isaac, the story in which Abraham was willing not to spare his own son. The point of 8:32 is that if God has indeed given his Son for those who were his enemies we know for certain that God will give us all things now that we are his adopted children. In 8:33-34 the same point is made by switching to a juridical metaphor: Who will bring charges against those whom God has elected to salvation? If it is God who has justified us, who can possibly condemn us? The whole certainty of salvation, the completion of God's design, lies in one fact: that Christ did in fact die on our behalf and was raised on our behalf (4:25) and that in him our human nature has been exalted to the right hand of God. Even more, Christ now intercedes on our behalf (cf. 8:26). Given that all of this is true, how could God's work possibly fail?

(2) The rhetorical question of 8:33 is rephrased by another rhetorical question in 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The answer to this question is stated unambiguously in 8:38-39. At first glance, it might appear that we could be separated from the love of Christ by various negative circumstances, some of which Paul lists in 8:35. In 8:36 Paul cites Psalm 44:22 which is a plea for help made for Israel. In this case, Israel's defeat and exile appear to indicate that God has rejected her or is simply indifferent: "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!" (Psalm 44:23). Paul imagines Christians drawing similar conclusions about similar circumstances. But suffering does not lead Paul to this conclusion (remember 5:3-5!) but to a very different one: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (8:37). The affirmation made in 8:38-39 is clearly based on Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The arrest, torture and crucifixion of Jesus did not mean that God had abandoned him or had become indifferent and this is demonstrated in the resurrection. The cross was followed by the victory of God. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God has already won the great victory and has shown that there is finally nothing which can resist his saving work. God has determined to bring redemption out of suffering, good out of evil, righteousness out of sin and the resurrection shows that this determination has already won out.

9:1-33: The Unbelief of Israel

(1) Chapters 9-11 are closely related to the conclusion that Paul has come to in chapter 8. If election is so certain, if God's salvation is so reliable, how do we explain the situation of Israel which has rejected the Messiah? Is this not proof that something has gone horribly wrong with God's design? In 9-11 Paul argues that the situation of Israel only confirms what he has already said about God.

(2) As this argument unfolds, it is important to notice how Paul positions himself with respect to Israel and why he believes the question of Israel's destiny to be so important. After having asserted that nothing can separate us from Christ in 8:38-39, Paul says that he would be willingly separated from Christ for the sake of Israel—he would willingly accept damnation if this would save Israel. The situation of Israel is one which has caused him "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" (9:2). For Paul, being a Jew is not a matter of indifference (3:1-3) and this becomes all the more clear in 9:4-5. It is the gifts which have been bestowed upon Israel that make her fall all the more incomprehensible and dismaying.

(3) **Thesis:** "But it is not as though the word of God has failed" (9:6). **Argument:** Not all who are physically descended from Abraham really belong to Israel. Israel can not simply be identified with those who call themselves Jews (the way for this statement has been prepared for by 2:17-29). Paul's argument is supported by reference to Abraham and Isaac. Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, and yet only one of his physical descendants received the promise—Isaac (9:9; cf. Genesis 18:10). Likewise, Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, and only one received the covenant—Jacob (9:12-13; cf. Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2,3). The true Israel exists and has always existed not as

a matter of physical descent but by God's election and grace. Paul's understanding of this radical because the true descendants of Abraham actually narrow to one person, the one elected by God who is Jesus Christ (cf. Galatians 3:15-16; 29). Jesus Christ is God's elected Israel and it is in him that the true Israel is elected (cf. Ephesians 1:3-6).

(4) This argument leads to two questions: (1) If God elects whom he wills is this not unjust (9:14)? and (2) If God's will can not be resisted is it possible for God to find fault (9:19)? The answer to the first question is "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy" (9:16). Paul's focus in this discussion is on God's mercy, a mercy which comes to us without merit. Paul wants to avoid the notion that somehow God owes us grace. The fact that the existence of God's people depends upon election and grace is not unjust; it must be seen in the light of God's larger purposes which embrace creation and are merciful. Further, election and grace remove salvation from the realm of mere human effort and place it within the realm of God's providence. The answer to the second question is "Has the potter no right over the clay...?" (9:21). The image is borrowed from Jeremiah 18:6. Once again, Paul introduces the issue of perspective. God's sovereignty is not to be thought of as something that excuses or causes human sin but as that which aims as mercy for sinners. This seems to be the point of the quotations from Hosea 2:23 (9:25) and Hosea 1:10 (9:26). The purpose of election is not to narrow Israel but to broaden it. Note that the emphasis of chapters 9-11 is on the mercy of God. The quotation from Isaiah 10:22, 23 in 9:27 reinforces Paul's point: Not all who are identified with Israel are part of God's elect people.

(5) **Conclusion:** The apparent disaster of Israel's unbelief has to be seen within a larger perspective, a perspective which Paul believes to be that of Scripture. God works by grace (not merely by biology) to create a people and God's purposes have an aim beyond Israel.

(6) The concluding section in 9:30-33 serves to remind us of the above points. Gentiles might object "Why did God even begin with Israel?" and Jews might object "Why should God include Gentiles into the covenant with Abraham? And yet both Jews and Gentiles, as Paul has made clear, have to recognize that their status is completely dependent upon God's grace. Salvation by grace through a crucified messiah will always have something scandalous about it, something that will offend some human sensibility.

(7) The quote in 9:33 from Isaiah 28:16 indicates that Israel's unbelief was foreseen by God and it is Paul's conviction that even this apparent disaster is being used by God to further his purposes.

10:1-21: God's One Design for Jews and Gentiles

(1) Note that 10:1 repeats Paul's commitment to Israel so that what was said in 9:1-5 remains at the forefront.

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(2) 10:2-4 describes briefly the nature of Israel's stumbling. Israel has misunderstood God's purposes. She does not see that "Christ is the end [*telos*—fulfillment, culmination, completion] of the law" (10:4). In Christ the law has been fulfilled and brought to its culmination but Israel has largely not seen this because she "did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). Thus, the history of Israel is marked by a profound irony. Rather than receive the gift of God's righteousness, Israel has wanted to establish her own righteousness and in so doing has become sinful.

(3) What is at issue are two fundamentally different views about how we are properly related to God. One view is expressed in 10:5 with a citation from Leviticus 18:5. What Paul takes this text to mean is that one can live by one's keeping of the law. But there is another view, one which is contained in the Old Testament itself which Paul expresses by a series of citations:

Romans 10:6 = Deuteronomy 30:12, 13
Romans 10:7 = Deuteronomy 30:13 (altered citation)
Romans 10:8 = Deuteronomy 30:14

The meaning of these citations and Paul's interpretation of them comes to something like this: Who has brought about the incarnation? God! Who raised Jesus from the dead? God! Salvation must consist in laying hold of what God provides and this is done through faith. As C.K Barrett notes: "Faith, as a divine possibility, is an immediate possibility. That which man might seek in heaven and hell in vain is at his side. Faith alone is what God seeks, and that he himself provides." God's one design for Jews and Gentiles, as expressed in 10:9-13, is "the obedience of faith" (1:5).

(4) 10:13 is a crucial verse and cites Joel 2:32: "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Note that "everyone" here includes both Jews and Gentiles and suggests something about the scope of God's saving work.

(5) While Israel's stumbling has been foreseen by God, is being used by God and has been (in some mysterious way) caused by God (11:25), we are not speaking about a mechanism when speaking of God's designs. Israel did fall into sin through her own unbelief and she had no excuse for doing so because she knew better as the citation from Psalm 19:4 in 10:18 indicates. Israel not only had the prophetic word she also had God himself to call her back from her unfaithfulness: "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (10:21 = Isaiah 65:2).

(6) This chapter helps to advance Paul's argument in that it reminds us of two important things which Paul understands to be revealed in Scripture: (1) That God always intended salvation to be received as a gift and that Israel's departure from this intention was a departure and not the norm. The Gospel is anticipated in Scripture as is Israel's departure from it. (2) The reception of the Gospel by Gentiles is also foreseen in Scripture, hence the citation of Isaiah 65:2 in 10:20.

Remember Paul's opening thesis: "But it is not as though the word of God had failed" (9:6). Actually, it has succeeded.

11:1-36: The Completion of God's Plan

(1) Paul now has answered several important questions: (1) Has God's plan failed (9:6)? No, because the existence of Israel has never been simply a biological or national fact but has depended upon God's electing grace. (2) Is God's electing grace unfair, because some seem to be chosen and other not (9:14)? No, because through election all depends not upon human merit or exertion but upon God who is merciful. (3) Is Israel's (almost complete) refusal to accept the messiah not a sign that grace has indeed failed (10:14-21)? No, because this is seen prophetically in Scripture and has meant that the Gospel has been taken to the Gentiles, also seen prophetically in Scripture. Now he comes to final question: Has God rejected his people Israel (11:1)? The answer is: "By no means!"

(2) Paul's answer to the question of whether God has rejected his people Israel is based on three things: (1) Scriptural prophecy, (2) Paul's own witness and (3) the character of God.

(3) 11:1-10: The first element that comes into play is Paul's own witness. God has not rejected his people because there are Jewish Christians like Paul who have received the Messiah. This shows that "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (11:2). A remnant of Israel has remained because God has intended such. (This means that the remnant can not become self-righteous or complacent.)

(4) The second element that comes into play is scriptural prophecy. The situation of Israel being reduced to a small remnant is both reflected by and predicted in Scripture. Paul refers to I Kings 19 in which the prophet Elijah flees for his life believing that all of Israel has yielded to the Canaanite god Baal. In 11:4 Paul cites I Kings 19:18 to indicate that Elijah is told that God has preserved a faithful remnant of Israel and that not all is lost. Paul's own experience and scriptural prophecy are combined to state a conclusion: "So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (11:5). Paul then cites Deuteronomy 29:4 (11:8) and Psalm 69:22, 23 (11:9, 10) to indicate that what has happened is the result both of Israel's unfaithfulness and God's providence. Israel's unfaithfulness and the existence of a remnant is neither simply the result of human actions or God's providence but involves both. Paul does not attempt to sort them out precisely.

(5) 11:11-24: This section is addressed to Gentiles and is the mirror image of what Paul has said about the remnant of Israel being dependent upon God's electing grace. That there are any Gentiles at all who are part of God's covenant people is also a work of pure grace and Gentiles must be aware of this lest they complacently gloat over the unfaithfulness of Israel. Israel's unbelief is only temporary, not final and even her unbelief has been used by God to further his own purposes—that Gentiles might be brought into the covenant people. Paul probably has texts like Isaiah 2:1-5 in

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mind here. If Israel's unbelief can be used for good, imagine what her full restoration might mean (11:12)! For Paul the restoration of Israel is an eschatological hope. What he means is the acceptance of the Gospel by Israel.

(6) The center of this section is a metaphor, that of the olive tree and branches which have been cut off and branches which have been grafted on. Some have criticized the metaphor as not in keeping with known agricultural practice but this is actually the point—Paul is indicating not a natural process but the working of grace. The metaphor makes several important points. (1) Gentiles are dependent upon what God has accomplished in Israel (11:18) and continue to be dependent upon this. Within God's purposes there are no "self-made men". (2) Some of Israel's branches have been broken off due to unbelief (11:20) but rather than causing Gentiles to brag about their current status, this is a call to humility and obedience (11:21). (3) The removal of Israel's natural branches is not final: "even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in again" (11:23). While Paul does not tell us the precise outcome of God's plan it is clear that God's actions are aimed at mercy; he graciously acts to redeem his fallen creatures. Here the final element of Paul's argument comes into play, the character of God. God is fundamentally faithful and this means that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (11:29). In 11:3–32 the clear emphasis is on God's mercy: Disobedient Gentiles receive mercy and disobedient Israel receives mercy. Why? Because this is the purpose of God. God's purposes can only be stated in a paradoxical way: "For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all" (11:32). As C.K Barrett has put it, there is a paradox in the way that God saves fallen sinners by grace: "Every man must be damned if he is to be justified."

(7) The whole argument closes not with a claim that the purposes of God have finally been "figured out" and that all is now obvious. Instead, the argument closes with a doxology and an acknowledgment that God's wisdom is "unsearchable" (11:33). Ephesians 1 might be brought in at this point to make a similar point in a similar way.

(7) The conclusion of the whole argument of 9-11 is in 11:25-36. Part of Israel has been hardened (cf. 9:17-18) so as to allow for the Gentile mission and when this has been complete "all Israel will be saved" (11:26), meaning Israel composed of Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. What Paul says about (unbelieving Israel) being God's enemy (11:28) needs to be read in light of what he has said about every person in 5:10.

NOTES ON ROMANS 12-13

12:1-2

(1) A common way of dividing Romans is to view chapters 1-11 as the “theological” part of the letter and chapters 12-15 as the “practical” part. This approach to the letter is misleading in that it suggests two incorrect things about Paul’s teaching. It suggest, first, that Paul has a theology which can be neatly separated from “morality” and, second, that Paul’s “practical” advice is simply is simply a series of “helpful hints” which require no theological foundation. The truth is that for Paul (and for the whole of early Christianity) there is no separation between “theology” and “ethics”. For Paul there is no such thing as “Christian ethics” but only a faith that must be embodied.

(2) We have already seen this with particular force in Romans 6:1-14 which is neither a discussion of baptism nor of Christian behavior but a sketch of the present position of Christians within the larger context of God’s designs. Through baptism, Christians have already partially entered the new world brought about by Jesus’ resurrection (6:4).

(3) The same pattern can be seen in Paul’s other letters where Paul is concerned to work out the implications of core Christian convictions. The following texts make this clear: I Corinthians 6:9-20; I Corinthians 10:14-22; II Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:1-8; Galatians 6:1-10; Ephesians 4:17-5:11; Philippians 2:1-11

(4) The best way, therefore, to think of Romans 12-15 is not as “practical advice” (now that, thank goodness, the theology is finally over) but as a sketch of what “the obedience of faith” (1:5) looks like in practice. Chapters 12-15 answer the question of what life under the gospel of grace looks like.

(5) 12:1 makes this very clear in that the phrase “the mercies of God” essentially constitutes a summary of chapters 1-11 and refers back to the concluding argument of 11:28-32. “Mercies” for Paul is simply a shorthand way of speaking about all of God’s work. Therefore, 12:1 says, in effect, “Given that everything I have argued thus far is true, here is what you should be doing...” Here we need to especially remember that the purpose of God’s mercies is not to get us “off the hook” but to lead us to obedience. Paul is in complete agreement with James 2:17: “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.” To avoid confusion we might also say that “faith without actual obedience is no faith at all”.

(6) 12:1 functions as the “thesis sentence” for all that is to follow and is thus important. This sentence is filled with technical terms drawn from the Old Testament’s vocabulary of worship, the terms “present,” “sacrifice,” “holy” and “acceptable” are all technical terms drawn from Israel’s worship. Paul has chosen to describe “the obedience of faith” as an on-going act of worship offered to God. The conviction behind this description may be the belief that the Church is the new temple

(cf. II Corinthians 6:19-20). Two phrases add a good deal of definiteness to what Paul is describing. The phrase "your bodies" here means "your own selves," the body being a way of speaking about the whole person (as in the resurrection of the body). The "liturgy" which is the obedience of faith has to do with whole person, the person's motivations and actions. The phrase usually translated as "your spiritual worship" is difficult to render into English, having no exact equivalent. Paul's phrase here is *logiké latría* which means something like "worship (a Greek term for worship used in the Septuagint is employed) according to the logos". The phrase could mean "rational worship" but this would give the wrong impression since what is meant by "rational" now does not approximate Paul's meaning. Nor is "spiritual worship" a very good translation either, since "spiritual" is often thought of as the opposite of "physical". What Paul means is worship offered by one's very being not merely an offering of sentiments or a few deeds. Here we want to think back to 8:1-11 where it was made clear that the mind (another meaning for logos) set on the flesh is hostile to God but the mind guided by the Spirit aims at pleasing God (cf. Colossians 1:9-10). The liturgy which is the Christian life is an on-going offering of one's self in obedience to God, an obedience which springs from a radically changed set of intentions and purposes—the desire to please God has become the Christian's chief desire.

(7) 12:2 also refers back to the important distinction made in 8:1-11. To be conformed to the world here means accepting the assumptions of a world which takes no account of the work of Christ. This means remaining in the world described by Romans 1-3. The work of the Spirit, however, is to transform the mind, to change its assumptions. What Paul means here is expressed by Colossians 3:10 which describes the "new self" given in baptism as the self "which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator". The renewed mind seeks to know the will of God and then attempts to do it. The Christian life is both aimed at holiness but also holiness is the thing which makes it possible. Revelation is not merely a matter of learning new and interesting things; the content of revelation is only really open to the sanctified mind.

12:3-21

(1) 12:3-8: It is fairly clear from this that there are people in the Roman church who have a rather inflated estimate of themselves (quite possibly Gentile Christians as chapter 14 seems to indicate). While thinking of oneself as important and even boasting of one's accomplishments is part of Roman culture, doing so represents for Paul conformity to the world. Paul's point is not simply that bragging is an unchristian thing to do but that the mentality that supports it contradicts the new order established by God in Christ. The problem of inflated egos in Rome and the consequent division it has caused is for Paul neither a "moral" nor a "spiritual" problem but an obedience problem—it constitutes a denial of the work of God. To remedy this Paul offers a "transformed" perspective. The Church is like a body, a body in which God has given different graces for different purposes (12:6). The Church is not a collection of egos bouncing off one another but "one body of Christ" (12:5) in which the individual finds his or her meaning in service to the body. This image of the

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body figures prominently in Paul's consideration of the Church: I Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:12-16; Colossians 1:18, 2:19, 3:15.

(2) The principles stated in 12:9-21 are not random bits of advice but an explication of what it means to live under 12:1-2. What Paul is offering here is not simply rules to be followed but guidance on what "the obedience of faith" looks like. Note that 12:14 ("Bless those who persecute you...") seems to be a citation of the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28) and that 12:20 ("...if your enemy is hungry...") is a quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22.

13:1-7

(1) What Paul says about the state in this section has given rise to numerous Christian political philosophies, both good and ill. Our concern is not what different people have made of this text but what Paul means by it and the place it has in his argument. Paul's point here seems to be that life under grace does not mean an unbounded freedom either in the realm of church life nor in the realm of civil life. Paul sees the state (in this case the Roman state) as playing a role in God's providential ordering of the world in that governments provide civil order—they restrain evil. It is important to notice (some have missed the distinction) that Paul makes a distinction between authority coming from God (13:1), which means it has to serve God's purposes, and all states simply being divinely willed, which means that they can claim absolute authority. For Paul the state can not claim absolute authority because the ruler is "the servant of God" (13:4).

(2) For Paul, Christianity does not mean a withdrawing into a purely spiritual realm nor does it mean the abandonment of civil life. The principle, once again, is that grace does not erase responsibility but creates it and hence we have 13:7.

(3) It might be helpful to remember in this context that the Roman state did make divine claims for itself and that the purpose of Roman political theology was to enhance the authority of the emperor and create a docile citizenry, one which yielded to a form of government authorized by the gods and even presided over by one (the emperor). Paul does not accept this way of thinking but strips the state of any claim to divine power and demotes it to a "servant".

13:8-10

(1) This section is still guided by the "grace creates responsibility" theme and is not a diversion from it. In light of this, 13:8 ("Owe no one anything, except to love each other...") needs to be read not as dealing with money but with obligations: Don't leave your obligations to one another undischarged and do not forget the common obligations to love one another. In quoting Leviticus 19:18 in 13:9 Paul is not attempting to set up a new way keeping the law (an easier or more gracious one) but making the point that in the Church the substance of the law is fulfilled. Also, Paul is attempting to identify the Church with Israel, making the point that God's will for his people has not changed.

(2) The key things to keep in mind here is what Paul means by love. In chapters 14-15 this will be very important. For Paul the whole meaning of love is established by God in the cross as 5:6-11 makes clear (see also Ephesians 4:25-5:2). The “obedience of faith” is made possible by grace and takes the form of Christ’s act upon the cross.

13:11-14

(1) This section conveys a sense of urgency. For Paul, life under grace is lived not for the purpose of “being a good person” but for the purpose of preparing for the completion of God’s designs (cf. I Thessalonians 3:11-4:8).

(2) 13:11-2 makes use of eschatological terminology: “time,” “hour,” and “wake from sleep”. The old order of the world has almost run its course; the night of sin and death is already retreating against the rise of the sun—Christ. Because of this, Christians are called to live in the light of the day. The old order and the life which pertains to it are still present but they will soon vanish and be replaced completely by God’s new order. The Christian is the person who lives in conformity not with the old order but with the new order in advance of its arrival. For this reason, the Christian life will always be difficult and appear strange.

(3) The language of 13:14 is quite possibly baptismal language (cf. Colossians 3:5-11). What is put on in baptism is Christ. Note that this is also a return to 8:1-1

NOTES ON ROMANS 14-16

14:1-12

(1) Paul's discussion of the "strong" and the "weak", which runs from 14:1-15:13, probably began in 12:3-21. If the latter does not directly address the issue it does provide a context in which it can be addressed.

(2) The "weak" are people who are weak in faith. They are Christians who have not yet grasped the radical nature of the Gospel which Paul has just set forth. They have not quite grasped the notion that our relationship with God is based solely on God's electing grace and that our righteousness is based upon God's righteousness. The "weak" seem to hold the belief that our relationship with God involves some pre-conditions which we must meet first. Three things are mentioned about the "weak": (a) they abstain from meat (14:2, 21), (b) they regard some days as having religious significance (14:5) and (c) they do not drink wine (14:17, 21).

(3) 14:1-3 is an appeal to charity (as in 13:9). Both the "strong" and the "weak" are in spiritual danger. The "strong", while they understand the implications of the Gospel better, are in danger of viewing their faith as a sign of superiority—thus overthrowing the whole doctrine of grace. The "weak" are in danger of identifying their abstentions with God's righteousness, also overthrowing the doctrine of grace.

(4) 14:4: This places the judgments of the both parties in perspective. It is God who decides the acceptability of his servants' service, not the "strong" or the "weak".

(5) 14:5-6: One issue dealt with here is probably that of the Sabbath. There may be Jewish Christians who keep the Sabbath while there are Gentile Christians who do not do so. The "strong" are not to condemn this practice because those who follow it believe themselves to be honoring the Lord; they understand themselves to be following a divine command. The point is that they are not merely pleasing themselves. Likewise, the "strong" are not to be condemned for eating meat (which most likely came from a sacrifice in a pagan temple as did most meat) because they do so "in honor of the Lord" (14:6). The "weak" abstain from eating meat "in honor of the Lord" (14:6) are so are not to be condemned. The "strong" exercise their freedom in Christ (which Paul considers to be a good thing) and the "weak" abstain from such freedom in the belief that they are honoring the Lord (which Paul considers to be a good thing). While Paul shares the outlook of the "strong" (cf. I Corinthians 8:1-13), he is unwilling for such a minor issue to become a point of division. Charity demands that each party understand the real motives of the other and to honor honorable motives. This is not to say that Paul is a proponent of "unity for unity's sake". His teaching on excommunication in I Corinthians 5:1-5 suggests that Paul was uncompromising on fundamentals.

(6) 14:7-12: The disputants in Rome, both of whom have failed to grasp the doctrine of grace, need to be reminded of a cardinal point: because of Jesus' death and resurrection Christians belong in life and death to God. Neither the presumptions of freedom nor the reservations of scruples govern our relationship to God; neither our "freedom" nor our "scruples" commend us to God. In such matters it is wrong, Paul says, to make a judgment that what another person is doing is unacceptable to God. Because we shall all be judged by God, God is capable of determining what he finds acceptable for himself. By exhorting the Romans to abstain from judgment in such matters, Paul is not advocating a kind of relativism but underlining the principle of 12:4. If the both parties had heeded this principle, the present dispute would not have occurred. We will all stand before the "the judgment seat of God" (cf. II Corinthians 5:10) and so will have to account for our own actions; presumably we will not be asked to evaluate the motives of other people, motives about which we may be completely wrong. Paul thus comes to a position which does not neatly fit into our categories of either "loving" or "judgmental" (a great thing). The "strong" are in fact right but if they believe their rightness to be the source of their relationship to God they are wrong. The "weak" are wrong but still accepted by God.

14:13-23

(1) This section is concrete illustration of what Paul says in 13:9-10: "The commandments...are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself...love is the fulfilling of the law.'"

(2) Instead of passing judgment on one another (by which Paul means making a judgment about another person's status before God) must be replaced with a determination, a decision, to not hinder a fellow Christian. A new focus is needed, that of 12:5—transformed judgment (12:2) is absolutely essential. It is important that Paul makes his own position unambiguously clear: "I know an am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself" (14:14). Paul is clearly in sympathy with the "strong" though he is very critical of their actions.

(3) It is fairly clear that 14:15-23 is addressed to the "strong". In matters which are not essential one has to adopt the view that one's actions will not be governed simply by what one knows to be correct (Paul sees no problem in eating meat from animals sacrificed in pagan temples) but by the effects of one's action on a fellow Christian. Love, thus, is not an act of mere "tolerance" but a matter of trying to understand the effects of one's own words and actions on a fellow Christian. The "strong" may be exercising a genuine liberty, but this liberty should not be exercised if it causes grief to another Christian who might either be scandalized by the sight of a fellow Christian doing what something he/she is convinced is immoral or be led to do the same thing him/herself in violation of conscience. What if the fact that the "strong" eat "pagan" meat causes one of the "weak" to conclude "Well, I guess that there really is no difference between paganism and Christianity!"? The "strong," while claiming to have faith do not actually reflect the "obedience of faith". Their insistence that "I have a right to..." is simply self-assertion that will "destroy the one for whom Christ died" (14:15). The "strong" need to be reminded that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of

eating and drinking but of righteousness [1:16-17] and peace [5:1] and joy [8:26-30] in the Holy Spirit" (14:17).

(4) The "transformed mind" (12:2) sees things in a different way. Instead of pushing a private agenda (however legitimate and even worthy), we are required to see things from a new perspective. What must be uppermost in our minds is what will edify and build up the Body (14:19) not "my rights" or "what I personally think is important". Once again, this is not relativism or "peace at all costs". In matters which are not essential we must avoid making other "stumble" (14:21). Paul's question to the "strong" is something like this: For the sake of insisting on your freedom to eat any kind of food would you undermine the work of God in a fellow Christian? Loving your neighbor means looking out for their spiritual well being even when it means a limitation of your own proper freedom: "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble" (14:21).

(5) The "strong" have an obligation to the "weak" (12:10!). The "strong" must exercise self-restraint lest the "weak" adopt their habits not because they have come to see them as good and proper but because they are afraid of ridicule and exclusion.

15:1-13

(1) 15:1-6: With this section Paul concludes his attempt to guide the "strong" and the "weak". In 15:1 Paul now explicitly identifies himself with the "strong" and says that this group must "bear with the failings of the weak". Once again, this is not mere tolerance and Paul's argument is grounded in theology. The warrant for the "strong" to give up their freedom to accommodate the weak is the example of Christ's life considered as a whole: "For Christ did not please himself..." (15:3). Because Christ's actions were not aimed at his own happiness or benefit, those who really are "strong" but follow the same path. This is made very clear by quoting Psalm 69:9 in 15:3. In the Psalm, the reproaches of sinners fall upon God's representative and this underlines Christ's innocent suffering. Christ most certainly did not please himself but became obedient to please God. This is what should guide the "strong". The aim of Paul's advice is not to protect some type of artificial "unity" but to attain something much more profound, "that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:6). This takes us back to 14:1-12 where the Lordship of God relativizes all human attempts at pleasing oneself.

(2) 15:7-13: Once again Christ is the foundation for the life Paul commends. Christ "became a servant to the circumcised" (15:8), meaning that Christ became a servant of the Jews in that through him God's design for all people could come about, thus fulfilling the promise to Abraham. Jesus' service to the Jews was literally self-sacrificial and in him the promises to "Israel" (Jewish and Gentile Christians) are kept. To make this point, Paul cites four Old Testament texts: Psalm 18:49 (=15:9), Deuteronomy 32:43 (=15:10), Psalm 117:1 (=15:11) and Isaiah 11:10 (=15:12). This chain

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of Scripture citations is designed to underwrite trust in God's faithfulness. Paul expects not grudging accommodation of the "weak" but that they will be filled with "all joy and peace" (15:13).

15:14-33

(1) 15:14-21: This section offers a preface to the real purpose of this whole letter. Here, Paul offers a summary of what he has attempted to develop. Paul's ministry is "in the priestly service of the gospel of God" (15:16) and its aim is to present "the offering of the Gentiles" (15:16) to God so as to be "acceptable". Note that all this terminology describing Paul's ministry is borrowed from Israel's worship. The purpose of this ministry is to bring the Gentiles to "obedience" (15:18=1:5). The theme of this section was presented in 10:13 and it explains Paul's missionary strategy and logic. This strategy and logic are summarized by a quote from Isaiah 52:15 (15:21).

(2) The next phase of Paul's mission will take him to the far western end of the Roman Empire and it is his hope "to be helped on my journey there by you" (15:24).

16:1-27

(1) The thing to note about this chapter is that it indicates that Paul knows quite a number of people in Rome. 16:22 tells us that this letter was dictated by Paul. 16:23 tells us that this letter was probably written from Ephesus since Gaius is mentioned in Acts 19:29 as being in Ephesus. Note how the final doxology in 16:25-27 returns to the themes of 1:1-6 and echoes the themes of Ephesians 1.