

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.

St. Peter's Anglican Church, Tallahassee, Florida
Fr. Michael Petty

(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

St. Peter's Anglican Church, Tallahassee, Florida
Fr. Michael Petty

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.