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# ROMANS

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## INTRODUCTION

**Author.** There are scholars who deny that the apostle Paul wrote all the letters ascribed to him, but virtually no one disputes that Romans was his letter. Pauline authorship of Romans has been affirmed by even the most critical scholars of the last 200 years.

**Date.** According to Rm 15, Paul's travel plans included three places: Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain (15:23-29). Paul explicitly mentioned his intent to go to Jerusalem to deposit the proceeds from the offering gathered by the Gentile churches in the Mediterranean world (Ac 19:21; 20:16; Rm 15:25-27), then to go to Rome (Ac 19:21; Rm 1:11-13; 15:24, 28), and then to Spain (Rm 15:24, 28). The Acts passages are found in the context of Paul's third missionary journey. He was probably in Greece when he wrote Romans (Ac 20:2-3), more than likely Corinth, which had been his base previously. Paul commends several who lived in or around Corinth, such as Phoebe who lived in Cenchrea, about seven miles southeast of Corinth (16:1), and Gaius (Rm 16:23; 1Co 1:14). These points suggest a Corinthian origination of the letter. It is intriguing to think of Paul walking through Corinth, observing the immorality there, then writing about the decadence of the world in Rm 1, or through the business quarter of Corinth where the famous Corinthian pottery was made, and writing about the potter and the clay in Rm 9:20-21. A good estimate for the date of the book is AD 57.

**Recipients.** Paul wrote the letter to the Christians in Rome. The population of the city in Paul's day is estimated at between one and four million. This imprecision is due in part to the large number of slaves in the city who were not included in the censuses. Possibly as much as 60 percent of the population was slaves, and when Paul begins with the words "Paul, a

bond-servant of Christ Jesus," he would have established rapport immediately with a good number in the church who were surely slaves. The Jewish community in Rome may have been as large as 40,000, influential in the economy, and perhaps the politics and arts of the great city.

Those to whom Paul wrote were believers already. Although in the early chapters Paul explores the plight of humankind apart from Christ, he was probably not emphasizing these points to evangelize his readers. Rather, he wrote to those who were "the called of Jesus Christ . . . who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints" (1:6-7), and his words were intended to influence true believers there.

There is debate over whether Paul wrote primarily to Gentile believers, Jewish believers, or to both. In some places he clearly addressed Gentiles in the church (1:5-6; 11:13; 15:7-9, 14-21); in others Jewish believers (2:17; 4:1; 6:14-15; 7:1, 4; and see the Jewish names in the list in 16:3, 7, 11). The most plausible view is that Paul wrote to both, and on occasion specifically addressed one group, then the other (1:7; 11:12-24; 14:1-15:13).

**Purpose.** Paul does not say explicitly why he wrote Romans, but there are hints. Serving as "bookends" for this epistle are almost identical verses, 1:5 and 16:26, where Paul says his apostolic commission (1:5) and the gospel (16:25-26) exist "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." This "bookending" suggests that Paul's purpose was to provide warrant for his mission to Spain and for the Roman Christians to support him. In addition, he desired to minister to them and with them (1:10-13), and to solicit support from them (15:24). But the closest we have to a purpose statement for the epistle is in 15:15-16, where Paul writes that

his intent was to remind them of some truths. This reminder came with the backing of his own apostolic commission (15:15), which, he notes, was a commission to evangelize primarily the Gentiles (15:16-20). The apostle then presented his itinerary, which included a visit to Rome to seek their financial assistance to execute the commission to Spain (15:24, 26-29). So Paul's purpose may have been to help the church clarify her doctrine and instill in her a new sense of urgency about the need for evangelizing the lost. This would motivate the church in Rome to provide support for Paul's outreach to Spain.

How do the diverse elements of the epistle fit with this overarching purpose? Chapters 1-3 present humanity's desperate need for the gospel (1:16-17). Each one has sinned and stands under the condemnation of God as a result of it—and no one can change his status through his own efforts. Thankfully there is hope. It is grounded in God's provision of His own righteousness, given freely to those who trust in the atoning death of His Son (3:21-31). The patriarch Abraham illustrates the nature and importance of faith, in that he was saved by faith and not by works (chap. 4). Chapters 5-8 present the extraordinary results of being right with God, results that the non-Christian world needs and that the Christian world should broadcast. Chapters 9-11 deal with the problem of Israel. One might argue that if God made promises to Israel in the OT and broke them by focusing His plans on the Church, then how could He be counted on to fulfill His promises in Christ? If God could not be counted on to keep those promises, why bother to evangelize? Paul argues that God *was* keeping His promises to Israel just as He always had, and that He could be trusted to keep them in Christ as well. In chaps. 12-16, the main theme is that of church unity. A church gutted by strife would be ill-suited to sustain a missionary venture for very long. Paul's goal for their unity is that they might glorify God (spread His name and enhance His reputation), and he prays to that end (15:5-6).

#### **Excursus: The New Perspective on Paul.**

As an important side note, since the late 1970s there has been a controversial approach to Paul's theology called "the New Perspective" on Paul. In a book entitled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, E. P. Sanders explores the relationship of Paul's theology to first-century Judaism. He maintains that there was a considerable amount

of grace in Judaism because God chose Israel by His grace to be His covenant people—to be saved. They kept the law (*nomos* in Gk.) to "stay in" that relationship, but not to "get in." Sanders coined the phrase "covenantal nomism" (staying in the covenant by faithfully observing the *nomos*, the law) to describe this belief. He argues, somewhat surprisingly, that this is also Paul's view of salvation in Christ: Christians are saved on the basis of election, but they uphold that status by good works (a dubious understanding of Paul). So (says Sanders), why would Paul criticize Judaism for being legalistic when in fact it was not? Sanders says that Paul either misrepresented Judaism as being legalistic when it was not, in contrast to the traditional understanding of Paul, or that Paul faulted a form of Judaism that is no longer extant, which in any case the apostle believed was flawed because it excluded Christ. If Sanders is right, then a new interpretive grid is necessary to understand the apostle's criticism of Judaism. But Sanders does not propose what that new grid should be, and remains uncertain as to what exactly the apostle Paul was doing in his polemic against Judaism.

Into this vacuum stepped J. D. G. Dunn. Dunn was not satisfied with Sanders's assertion that Paul misrepresented Judaism or rejected it just because it omitted Christ. Dunn alleges that Paul viewed Judaism as being ethnically too narrow. The "works of the law" that Paul opposed (especially, but not only, circumcision, observance of holy days, and the dietary laws) were the identity markers for the Jewish people whereby they preserved their distinctiveness and privileged status as God's covenant people. Paul, according to Dunn, was actually opposing their covenantal nomism. When the apostle wrote, "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His [God's] sight" (3:20, 28; cf. Gl 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), he opposed these works of the law because with them the Jewish people perpetuated a sense of isolationism and elitism that excluded the Gentiles from the covenant people of God. With Christ came a shift in God's redemptive program. Salvation was no longer confined to those who practice the covenant identity markers (i.e., solely the Jewish people), but became open to all by faith. It is therefore wrong to require Gentiles to do these works to enter into the covenant community. For this reason, Paul opposed such elitism as well as the imposition of "works of the law" upon Gentile converts, a problem at the center of the theological storm in Galatians. But once again, Dunn,

like Sanders, does not see the “works of the law” as entrance requirements or as legalistic acts.

A third major player in the New Perspective is N. T. Wright, whose approach to Paul parallels much of what is found in Dunn but arguably with more nuancing. Wright, like Dunn, is heavily indebted to Sanders, and argues that Paul’s view of salvation is less about how to get in to the covenant faithfulness of God and more about the assurance of being in that covenant. In Wright’s thinking, “justification” is about God’s recognition of those who are in the covenant by His faithfulness and their assurance of this status, rather than about God’s declaration of a sinner’s righteousness in Christ and His effecting that status. “Righteousness” for Wright is about the acquittal of the sinner as a result of God’s decision, rather than about the holiness of God being imputed to the sinner. “Works of the law” are about actions that one who is in the covenant by grace shows in response to that grace, rather than about attempts to establish a right standing with God through one’s own efforts.

Sanders, Dunn, and Wright have been criticized on a number of grounds. First, Sanders is partly right but mainly wrong on his understanding of the extent of grace in first-century Judaism. A considerable amount of evidence has been gathered to indicate that Early Judaism was much more synergistic than Sanders recognizes, with some texts affirming God’s grace but many affirming the need for obedience to the law for “staying in” salvation. Even in Sanders’s view, works play a determinative role in the outcome of salvation.

Second, Dunn insists that Paul criticized the Jewish people for their “works of the law” that barred Gentiles from being part of the covenant

people of God. But Paul repeatedly criticized the Jewish people not for their exclusivism, which was shattered by the coming of Christ, but for their failure to keep the law by doing its works, which led to their condemnation (2:2-3, 22-23, 25-27; 4:1-12).

Third, Wright’s view inherits all the problems of Sanders’s and Dunn’s, and collapses under the weight of the passages in Romans that indicate that justification *does something to the sinner*. It cannot be seen simply as an expression of God’s *recognition* that one is in the covenant people. Romans 5:1, for example, indicates that justification *produces* peace with God. Righteousness is indeed *imputed* to individuals who have trusted Christ. In Rm 4:7-8, Paul links imputed righteousness with “lawless deeds that have been forgiven, sins that have been covered, and sins that have not been taken into account by the Lord.”

Finally, and more generally, salvation for the Jewish people and Gentiles alike was promised *not* through the Mosaic covenant (the law of Moses), but through the Abrahamic covenant. Covenantal nomism fails precisely because the Mosaic covenant could not be kept by the Jewish people nor by anyone else (see Dt 31:29), and because it was not designed to ensure salvation either in terms of getting in *or* staying in a right standing with God (cf. Rm 3:19-20; 4:15; 7:5; 8:3). The way both Jews and Gentiles find salvation is through receiving the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, and that happens only through faith (Gn 15:6; Rm 4:13-17; Gl 3:6-14)—after the cross, faith *in Christ*. Works performed in compliance with the Mosaic covenant are inadequate to make one right with God, and this is the fatal flaw in Judaism that Paul addresses in Romans and Galatians.

## OUTLINE

- I. Sin: The Need for Being Right with God (1:1–3:20)
  - A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)
  - B. The Need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)
- II. Justification by Faith: The Means for Being Right with God (3:21–4:25)
  - A. Righteousness Is Available from God (3:21-26)
  - B. Righteousness Is Appropriated by Faith Alone (3:27–4:25)
- III. Blessings: The Results of Being Right with God (5:1–8:39)
  - A. Christians Can Boast in God (5:1-11)
  - B. Christians Can Live a Life of Security (5:12-21)
  - C. Christians Can Live a Life Free from the Absolute Domination of Sin (6:1–7:25)
  - D. Christians Have Life in the Holy Spirit (8:1-39)

- IV. Vindication: The Jewish People and the Problems with Being Right with God (9:1–11:36)
  - A. God Has Not Broken His Word to Israel (9:1-29)
  - B. God Has Not Cheated Israel (9:30–10:21)
  - C. God Has Not Rejected Israel (11:1-10)
  - D. Israel Is Not Lost Forever (11:11-36)
- V. Application: The Implications of Being Right with God (12:1–15:33)
  - A. The Implications for the Christian’s Spiritual Commitment (12:1-2)
  - B. The Implications for the Christian’s Life in the Body of Christ (12:3-13)
  - C. The Implications for the Christian’s Life in Relation to the Secular World (12:14–13:14)
  - D. The Implications for the Christian’s Life in His Relationships with Weaker and Differing Christians (14:1–15:13)
  - E. The Implications for the Support of Paul’s Ministry (15:14-33)
- VI. Paul’s Concluding Mandates (16:1-27)
  - A. Appreciate Christian Workers (16:1-16)
  - B. Avoid Contentious People (16:17-20a)
  - C. Be Encouraged by Christian Leaders (16:20b-23)
  - D. Glorify God (16:25-27)

## COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

### I. Sin: The Need for Being Right with God (1:1–3:20)

#### A. The Impact of the Gospel (1:1-17)

**1:1-3.** Paul begins his letter with a brief summary of the gospel he proclaimed and the purpose of his apostolic ministry. **Called** refers to the effectual, divine calling as opposed to human self-appointment. An **apostle** was a special messenger whose task was to spread the **gospel** message that had continuity with the OT. As a **descendant of David**, Jesus Christ could lay claim to the throne of David. In the Davidic Covenant, God promised that a son of David would rule Israel forever and provide security for her (2 Sm 7:8-17; 1Ch 17:1-15). None of David’s descendants qualified, but Mt 1:1 identifies who it is: “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, *the son of David* . . .” (my emphasis).

**1:4-5.** Jesus was **declared the Son of God with power**. The resurrection signaled a change not in His essence but in His function and manifestation now as the “Son-of-God-with-Power” (Ps 2:7; Ac 13:33; Heb 5:5). Paul’s apostleship existed to **bring about the obedience of faith**, which has an almost identical expression in 16:26. See “Purpose” in the introduction for the significance of the repetition.

**1:6-7.** These verses indicate that the readers were predominantly Gentile. More important than their ethnic background was their spiritual

position, **the called of Jesus Christ, called as saints, and beloved of God.**

In this introduction, Paul presents his apostolic credentials and goals. He is the apostle appointed to take the gospel to the Gentile people so that they come to faith and begin to live like Christians to the glory of God. Our passion should parallel Paul’s!

**1:8-15.** Paul gives the reason for his planned visit to Rome: **so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established (v. 11), so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles (v. 13), and I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians . . . (v. 14).** The **spiritual gift** is not specified. Paul would need to determine what kind of help they needed before he could specify what gift(s) he would use for their benefit. Verse 14 provides the basis for his strong desire to minister with the Romans. He was **under obligation and eager** to do so, reflecting God’s sovereign plans for him (Ac 9:15; 22:21; 26:16-20; 1Co 9:16-23).

**1:16-17.** These verses are often seen as the theme verses for Romans, though they correspond better with chaps. 1–8 than 9–16. **For (1:16)** offers an explanation for Paul’s eagerness to evangelize (1:15): **I am not ashamed of the gospel. For (second occurrence in 1:16)** gives the reason Paul is not ashamed: **it is the power of**

**God. Power** means “mighty potency; an effective, transforming force and ability.” **Salvation** was a word used in Greco-Roman settings for an individual being rescued from some physical peril, perhaps from a burning house or from drowning. Here it is God’s deliverance of sinners from the eternal consequences of sin. **Believes** was used most often for trust or reliance upon a person and what he says. Paul uses it for one’s reliance upon Christ for salvation. **To the Jew first and also to the Greek** probably describes the good fit the gospel of Christ is for the Jewish people (see 1:2-3). While it is true that the gospel came first to and then through the Jewish people historically (see Jn 4:22), Paul’s point here in vv. 16-17 seems to be theological (note the words “power,” “salvation,” “everyone who believes”) rather than historical, and Rm 1:2-3 appears to show the special relevance of the gospel to the Jewish people because it has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures.

**For** (1:17) explains *why* the gospel is the power of God (1:16): **in it the righteousness of God is revealed**. The phrase **righteousness of** [i.e., “that originates with”] **God** has become enormously controversial. Is this the covenant faithfulness of God? Is it God’s act of announcing or undertaking the vindication of His people on the judgment day? No doubt it includes these elements. But these signal what God’s righteousness *does* rather than *what it is*. A better view is that the **righteousness of God** is God’s moral virtue and excellence that prompts Him to do all that He does, including (among other things) bringing people into a proper relationship with Him, but also judging people for their sin. God’s moral virtue and excellence includes His justice that leads Him to judge sinners, but also His love that leads Him in Christ to redeem them. Paul’s emphasis in this verse is on the latter. Paul will make it clear in 3:21-26 that the key is not found in securing one’s own righteousness by keeping the law, but in God reckoning His own righteousness to those who have faith in His Son. This righteousness is **revealed** (“fully disclosed”) **from faith to faith**. The latter phrase is difficult, and it is best not to be dogmatic. A parallel construction is found with “from” and “to” in 2Co 2:16 (“from death to death” and “from life to life”). There the phrases suggest that Paul’s ministry resulted exclusively in death for the lost, and exclusively in life for believers. In Rm 1:17, the construction probably designates that faith in Christ is the only way one can receive God’s righteousness.

Paul cites Hab 2:4 for support. It should be translated “The one who is righteous by faith will live (be saved).” He uses the same verse in Gl 3:11 where he cites it to support how one receives eternal life (not through works of the law).

### **B. The Need for the Gospel (1:18–3:20)**

**1:18. For** explains why salvation is available only by faith (1:16-17). People are not able to establish a right standing before God because sin sabotages the attempt. Therefore a right standing before God comes only through reliance upon Christ. **Revealed** is the same word used in 1:17 for the manifestation of God’s righteousness to those who believe. God’s wrath is “fully disclosed” against humanity because all **suppress the truth in unrighteousness**. Paul introduces one reason for God condemning humankind. People possess some truth about Him but reject it.

**1:19-20. Because** launches the substantiation for Paul’s claim that people suppress knowledge of God. This knowledge is **evident within them**. **For** (1:20) introduces the basis for that claim. Paul mentions a paradox when he says that God’s **invisible attributes** are **clearly seen**. Creation displays God’s power and deity, so that when people suppress knowledge about Him available through the created order **they are without excuse** when He judges them for it. *No one* ever responds correctly to the light of God in creation.

**1:21-23. For** continues the theme of people being without excuse, begun in 1:20. They choose not to **honor** and thank Him, and worship created things rather than the Creator. Three times Paul says people **exchanged** the truth of God for lies (1:23, 25, 26), and three times he says **God gave them over** (1:24, 26, 28) to practices that manifested His judgment against them in this life. As people reject God’s standards and afflict themselves by their disobedience, their sin becomes their punishment.

**1:24-25. Therefore** provides a logical conclusion from the action of people in rejecting knowledge of God. **God gave them over** first to degrading religious practices (1:25). In various ways false religions cause their adherents to live in fear or engage in practices that cheapen their lives (**their bodies** are **dishonored**) and bring God’s judgment.

**1:26-27.** People “exchanged the truth of God” for idols (1:25); **For this reason God gave them over**, this time to homosexual behavior. Some

claim that Paul is saying that it is wrong only for those whom God did not create as homosexuals to engage in homosexual behavior (the underlying thought being that God has created some as homosexuals, a contention that is unsubstantiated in science or Scripture). Others argue that God is forbidding the ritual homosexuality practiced in Greco-Roman religions. The text says neither. The statement indicates that the homosexual behavior is a form of judgment against those who reject the knowledge of Him. If it is a form of His judgment, then the people of God must neither practice nor condone it.

**1:28-32.** People “exchanged” the natural function of the sexes (1:26) and abandoned knowledge about Him in creation (1:28); therefore, **God gave them over**, this time to social problems (unrighteousness, wickedness, greed) as a form of His judgment.

**2:1-2. Therefore** (v. 1) connects with the idea of God’s judgment mentioned by Paul in 1:18-19, a judgment that encompasses all of humanity. **You have no excuse** (or “no defense”) picks up the idea from 1:20, where people have no defense before God on the day of judgment, for everyone suppresses and rejects the knowledge of God they have from creation. God’s judgment **rightly** (lit., “according to the truth”) comes upon people. That is, it comes upon them “according to the truth,” according to the facts of how they actually live.

**2:3-5.** Moral people are presumptuous in their thinking. They strive to live a principled life, do not (usually) act as those in Rm 1, and assume that God will overlook their occasional moral lapse because they really do strive to be good. They do not have as many practical manifestations of God’s **judgment** in their lives as those who do not strive to be good, as seen in chap. 1. They mistake this lack of present judgment for God’s approval, and as proof that they will escape His eschatological judgment. That God does not vent His wrath upon them to a great extent in this life is designed by Him to cause them to recognize His goodness and turn to Him (**repentance**). But if they do not repent, they will face **the righteous judgment of God** (v. 5).

**2:6-11.** Verse 6 continues the sentence Paul began in v. 5. God **WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS** is a key for the rest of chap. 2. God judges based on how well one lives his moral code. The key is what one *does* in his or her life, not the honorable rules for living

which one applauds. God will render **eternal life** (v. 7) or **wrath and indignation** (v. 8) based on how one acts.

This interpretation is shocking in light of Paul’s consistent point that salvation is always and only by grace through faith in Christ (cf. 1:16-17; 3:21-26). Scholars debate whether Paul is speaking of true believers whose good works demonstrate their regeneration, and Paul surely held this belief (cf. Gl 5:16-19, 24; 6:8). But here Paul explained what is necessary to be right with God *apart from faith in Jesus*. There is no clear indication that Paul referred to believers in vv. 5-11, and he made it clear that people **do not obey the truth** (v. 8; cf. 1:18, where unbelievers “suppress the truth”) and **obey unrighteousness** (cf. 1:29, where they are “filled with all unrighteousness”). All people sin and consequently deserve the wrath that awaits them. The phrases **to (or of) the Jew first and also to the Greek** (vv. 9, 10) indicate that there is essential equality between both people groups regarding both the prospects of judgment, or of salvation apart from faith in Christ. But there is a place of prominence for the Jewish people because of their special privilege in God’s program, both as it relates to righteousness and to judgment (cf. the comments on 1:16, and Am 3:2; Lk 12:48).

**2:12-13. For** (v. 12) introduces Paul’s explanation about God impartially judging all people on the basis of their deeds. Sinful actions make one liable to judgment, whether that one has the law or not (v. 13).

**2:14-16. For** (v. 14) signals that Paul gives the basis for maintaining that a Gentile without the law of Moses will perish in God’s judgment. Based upon the natural circumstances of their birth, Gentiles do not have the law, but sometimes **do instinctively the things of the Law**, probably a reference to its moral requirements (e.g., loving one’s neighbor; not bearing false witness) rather than the ceremonial aspects (sacrificing a red heifer). When those who do not have the law sometimes do some of the things prescribed by the law of Moses (**the work of the Law**, v. 15), they **are a law to themselves**, i.e., Gentiles indicate that they have their own moral code that overlaps with the law. God created humanity with a sense of right and wrong (cf. 1:32), and while Adam’s fall damaged that, it did not erase it altogether. One’s moral code may be as rudimentary as “treat everyone fairly” or “be nice to everyone.” That moral code is an imperfect reflection of the morality God instilled in humankind, seen

most clearly in the law. The problem is that *no one* lives up to whatever moral code he or his culture approves. As a result, **their conscience** bears **witness** to how well they have kept their own moral code, and will accuse or defend them on the day of judgment. Each one's conscience will say, "You kept your moral standards when you did this and this . . ." But the conscience will *also* say, "You broke it here and here and here!" God knows **the secrets of men**, i.e., what their conscience tells them, and He will use these accusatory thoughts as evidence for condemnation on the day of judgment.

Although Gentiles do not have the OT law, they are still sinners and will still face condemnation from God. There are some who claim that God would give eternal life to someone who never hears about Jesus, as long as that person responds correctly to the light of God in creation, is sincere in his own religion, and is kind to other people. But Paul indicates otherwise. Such a Gentile is still a sinner, even on the basis of his own moral norms, and as a sinner will experience God's judgment and wrath.

**2:17-24.** Paul begins to turn his attention to the sinfulness of those in covenant with God, the Jewish people. He noted the special privileges the Jewish people enjoyed (vv. 17-20), but also their failure to live up to their privileges. Paul's point is not that every single Jew has stolen or committed adultery, but rather that the Jewish people as a whole (and the whole consists in the individual parts) have acted with such sinfulness that they disqualified themselves from being used by God to enlighten the world. Worse yet, by their sinfulness, they served to **dishonor God** (v. 23). The same thing can be said about Gentiles who profess to be Christians, but live scandalous lives. They harm God's reputation now as much as unbelieving Jews did then.

**2:25-29. Circumcision** (v. 25) was viewed by later generations of the Jewish people as a virtual guarantee of eternal life (cf. the ancient rabbinic commentaries *Gen R.* 48 [30<sup>a</sup>]; *Exod R.* 19 [81<sup>c</sup>]; and *Tanhuma B, hayye Sarah* 60<sup>b</sup>.8), and may have been in Paul's day as well. Sin in the life of a circumcised Jew canceled out the benefits of circumcision. Conversely, if a Gentile kept the law and did not sin, he would receive the benefits of the covenant people of God. Once again, Paul's point is that disobedience brings condemnation whether one is a Jew or not, and obedience without sin brings salvation (vv. 26-27). **For** (v. 28) begins an explanation as to why

being circumcised does not guarantee salvation. Here only in chap. 2 does Paul refer to believers, in this case exclusively Jewish believers, and his point is to argue that being right with God comes as He performs spiritual surgery upon the heart, not as one complies with the letter of the law, by undergoing circumcision in the flesh (v. 29). Note that Paul is speaking only of true, believing Jews in these verses. Gentile believers are not in view, and the idea that Gentile Christians are the new Israel is foreign to this section.

**3:1-2.** If both Jews and Gentiles are in equal danger because of their sin, as Paul said in chap. 2, then what benefit is there in being Jewish? Paul concedes that the Jewish people do have an historical advantage over Gentiles. **They were entrusted with the oracles** [the Hebrew Scriptures] of God is one advantage Paul mentions (see 9:4-5 for others).

**3:3-4.** Paul was apparently seeking to correct the idea held by many that God promised to save virtually every Jewish person. In response, Paul wrote that God's promises include not only promises to save, but also to judge (cf. Dt 30:15-20; Jr 16:10-15). He cited Ps 51:4, David's confession of sin with Bathsheba, where David recognized that God was just to punish him for that sin. Whenever a sinner, whether Jewish or Gentile, stands in the courtroom of the Judge and pleads his case, the Judge will *always* be found to be in the right and will win the case. When the verb **ARE JUDGED** is in the middle voice as it is here, it often means "to go to court" or "to engage in a legal dispute," and is the likely meaning here (so NIV; HCSB).

**3:5-7.** Paul put another argument on the lips of an imaginary opponent, a rhetorical device called "diatribe" (v. 5; for other examples of diatribe, see e.g., 2:3; 3:1; 6:1-2, 15; 9:19; 11:1, 11): "My **unrighteousness** (moral corruption) demonstrates just how morally excellent and virtuous God really is. Therefore, a person might object that since my sinfulness does God a favor by making Him look so good, He is not unjust or unfair (the likely meaning of **unrighteous** in this phrase), and therefore will not condemn me!" However, if a Jewish person could use this argument, so could a Gentile, for their lives were arguably more corrupt, and could make God look better still. Therefore, it would be unfair of God to judge Gentiles (**the world**, v. 6). But the Jewish people *relished* the prospect of God judging the Gentile world (e.g., *Sir* 36:1-10), and would not have conceded this point to Paul.



**3:8.** Some accused Paul of teaching that one should sin more to give God a chance to bring greater glory to Himself by providing more grace to counteract it. See the comments related to this in 5:20–6:2. But this is a misrepresentation of Paul’s views, and any Jewish antagonists who assigned this belief to Paul deserved the **condemnation** they received.

**3:9-18.** The question, **Are we** [the Jewish people] **better than they** [Gentiles]? probably looks back to the advantage of having the **oracles of God** in 3:2. The Jewish people had advantages, but without a proper response to them, they were no better off salvifically than Gentiles. Paul wove together several OT verses, cited loosely, to support the theme of humanity’s universal plight. Verses 10-12 describe humanity’s rejection of God (from Ps 14:1-3). **THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD** (v. 11) should be understood with its full force, and does not allow room for *anyone* to respond positively to the light of God in creation. If it were not for God seeking people, no one, left to their own motivation, would seek Him. Verses 13-14 describe the harm that comes from words, vv. 15-17 the harm that comes from actions. Paul loosely cites several OT passages (v. 13 = Ps 5:9; 140:3b; v. 14 = Ps 10:7) that indicate the comprehensiveness of humankind’s spiritual disease. In vv. 15-18 he cited Is 59:7-8, written by Isaiah about the sin of the Jewish people (Is 58:1, 14), so that Paul, once again, included them in the world’s troubles.

**3:19-20.** **Whatever the Law says** (v. 19) includes Gentiles, since all people are under some kind of moral code that they fail to keep adequately (cf. 2:12-16). Therefore, everyone is **accountable** (“subject to being prosecuted and found guilty”) to God. The referent of **works of the Law** (v. 20) has become astonishingly controversial. See the summary and critique of Dunn in the “Excursus” following the introduction to Romans. **Works of the Law** refers to deeds the law requires in order for one to remain in a proper covenant relationship with God. Paul mentioned **works of the Law** again in 3:28, but in 3:27 he used the solitary noun “works”, also used alone in 4:2, and the cognate verb “work” in 4:4, 5. **Works** without the phrase **of the Law** refers to general (religious) deeds anyone might do to enter into or maintain a right relationship with God, but **works of the Law** refers to the religious deeds from a Jewish vantage point, since their religious deeds were defined by the Mosaic law. Doing the law does not save a person, for one intent of the law was to inform Israel

about what sin was (**through the Law comes the knowledge of sin**) so that she could avoid God’s judgment and be used by Him to mediate His grace to the world. But the law of Moses was not designed *to save* per se. Salvation came through responding to God in faith in response to the promises He made in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gn 15:6), never through keeping the law of Moses (see the comments on Gl 3:6–4:7).

## II. Justification by Faith: The Means for Being Right with God (3:21–4:25)

### A. Righteousness Is Credited to Believers by God (3:21-26)

**3:21-26.** **But now** (v. 21) introduces a significant transition in the argument of Romans. After delineating the sorry spiritual condition of humankind, Paul began a discussion of how one can become right with God. The key is not found in securing one’s own righteousness by keeping the law, but in God imputing and crediting His own righteousness (His own moral excellence and virtue; see the comments on “righteousness” in 1:17) to those who have faith in His Son.

**But now** carries a temporal sense, “But now, after the cross.” For **the righteousness of God**, see 1:17. This **righteousness** has always been **apart from the Law** (cf. the example of Abraham in Rm 4, drawn from Gn 15). The Jewish people had misread the OT, wrongly prioritizing the law as the means for righteousness before God, and had neglected the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant for that. While this righteousness comes **apart from the Law**, it was **witnessed by the Law and the Prophets**; that is, the Hebrew Scriptures contain a predictive element pointing toward God’s bestowal of His righteousness to those who have faith (see some of the verses Paul will refer to: Hab 2:4; Gn 15:6; Ps 32:1-2; and Jr 31:33-34; Ezk 36:25-27; Is 53:4-6). God’s **righteousness** is **through faith in Jesus Christ** [lit., “faith/fullness of Jesus Christ”; Gk. *pisteos Iesou Christou*] (v. 22), which could mean either the believer’s “faith in Jesus Christ” (objective genitive, the traditional view) or “the faithfulness of Jesus” in dying on the cross (subjective genitive). The second view is not objectionable, but it is not required by the syntax. The traditional view is preferable. Usually *pistis* (faith) refers to one’s reliance upon another, and only when the context is explicit should the idea of “faithfulness” be ascribed to it. Also, several passages have a similar construction using the word “faith” followed by a member of the Godhead in the genitive case,

where one's faith is directed toward the divine one, but not indicating the "faith of" the one who is divine (cf. Mk 11:22; Ac 3:16; Php 1:27; Col 2:12; 2Th 2:13; Jms 2:1; Rv 2:13). This suggests that the phrase **faith of / in Christ** should be understood as having Jesus as the object of faith. In addition, the strong contextual evidence supports the view that this refers to the believer's faith in Jesus Christ (Rm 3:22c, 26, 27, 28, and throughout chap. 4; Gl 2:16). **For all those who believe** is not a redundancy if "faith in Christ" is an objective genitive, for this phrase gives the additional point that individuals from all people groups (Jews and Gentiles, **for there is no distinction**) can be saved by faith. The lack of **distinction** relates not only to salvation by faith in Christ, but to the consequences of sin as well (v. 23). **Fall short** means "lack" (1Co 1:7; 8:8). The **glory of God** is sometimes connected by Paul both to God's revealed perfections and to His immortality (Rm 1:23; 2:7-10; 5:1-5; 1Tm 1:17), so that lacking **the glory of God** here probably refers to God's immortal splendor forfeited by Adam and his descendants because of sin. But according to Early (intertestamental) Judaism, Adam possessed a special glory of his own as one made in the image of God, a special glory that he lost at the fall (*Apoc. Mos.* 20:2; 21:2, 6; 2*Apoc. Bar.* 56:5-6; *Gen. Rab.* 12.6.1), and which God will restore to the righteous in the future (CD 3:20; 1QS 4:6-8, 14-15, 22-23; 4*Ezra* 2:39; 7:97-98; 8:51-52; 2*Apoc. Bar.* 51:3, 10; 1*Enoch* 108:12-15; Rm 8:30). The emphasis, however, is upon *God's* glory.

**Being justified** (v. 24) probably connects with v. 22b, and reiterates the bright side of the "no distinction" theme, while v. 23 looks at the dark side of it. The verb **justified** (*dikaioo*) was a judicial term for a judge declaring a person innocent of whatever charges were levied against him. A sinner is rightly charged with breaking God's law. When a sinner trusts Christ for salvation, God declares him or her not only innocent of that charge (i.e., He "justifies" them, *dikaioo*), but as having kept the standard because of the relationship that is established with Him through Christ (Rm 8:4; 2Co 5:21). By God's declaration, the sinner is "put right" with God and possesses the status of "righteousness" (*dikaioisune*, a cognate of *dikaioo*, "to justify") on the basis of the favorable verdict rendered by the divine Judge. This is no legal fiction as is sometimes argued. When a judge declares innocent an individual charged with a crime, that declaration has a profound impact upon the one who was charged. **Grace**

denotes the character quality of benevolence that leads a benefactor to bestow a favor upon another. **Redemption** means "the act of setting one free by paying a ransom," used for paying a master the amount his slave was worth to purchase the slave's freedom. The blood of Jesus paid the ransom for believers (see the comments on Eph 1:7). **Propitiation** (v. 25) usually involved a sacrifice that averted the wrath of a divine being, but the word was also used in the LXX for the "mercy seat," the cover on the ark of the covenant onto which blood was sprinkled whereby sin was forgiven and wrath was turned away (cf. Lv 16:2, 13-15). Jesus' bloody cross, not the mercy seat, remains the place where God's wrath is appeased. **Faith** is "reliance upon a person, including what he says or does." One is justified by God when he or she relies upon Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died **to demonstrate** (or "prove") God's **righteousness** (see the comments on 1:17), which in vv. 25-26 refers more narrowly to His justice or fairness as part of His wider moral excellence. And it needed to be proven. If a judge did not condemn a guilty criminal but let him go free, or if he had the criminal's pet collie go to prison in his place, the judge would be unjust, unfair, unrighteous. But in the OT, God both forgave sinners and determined to have animals sacrificed for sins (Lv 16; cf. the comments on Heb 9:15; 10:4). God would be unjust for doing this, except the death of Jesus safeguarded **His righteousness**. In the death of Jesus, God vented His wrath against sin, keeping **His righteousness** intact, and God applied the atoning work of His Son to OT saints. On that basis they were forgiven and **His righteousness** was upheld. All this is not only true for OT saints, but is relevant **at the present time** (v. 26). The death of Jesus allows God to remain **just** and yet forgive sinners who have faith in Jesus today (He remains **just** and is **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**).

#### **B. Righteousness Is Appropriated by Faith Alone (3:27–4:25)**

**3:27-31.** In these verses, Paul presents the principles that flow logically from 3:21-26, and in chap. 4 he illustrates the principles with the concrete example of Abraham. The table at the top of the next page presents the connections.

It makes sense that if justification is a gift that springs from God's grace (3:22-26), then **boasting** in one's own ability to obtain it or maintain it **is excluded** (v. 27). The word **law** is puzzling, but here probably has a metaphorical meaning ("base, norm, standard, principle"), and probably

The Principles	The Concrete Illustration of the Principles
3:27 Boasting is excluded	4:1-3 Abraham could not boast
3:28 Justification is by faith, not works	4:4-8 Abraham was justified by faith not works
3:29-30 God justifies all by faith	4:9-12 Abraham indicates God justifies all by faith
3:31 Faith “establishes” the law	4:13-25 Abraham’s faith “established” the law

does not refer to the OT law. In vv. 29-30, Paul bolstered his argument about one way of salvation by referring to monotheism. If justification is available only through the Jewish law, then God is the God of the Jews only, and the Gentiles are excluded from a relationship with Him. Since salvation is by grace through faith, the question arises: “Does faith render the law purposeless?” (v. 31). What Paul means by **we establish the Law** is disputed, but it is possible that faith is the sole avenue whereby one is able to experience all of God’s promised blessings, blessings to which the law bore witness (3:21) but which could not be obtained on the basis of keeping the law (cf. 3:19-20; 4:13-15). While faith establishes **the Law**, v. 31 cannot be cited to support the idea that the law is still binding since it is not nullified by faith. Rather, faith does not nullify the teaching of the Pentateuch but actually establishes the law’s teaching, which includes justification by faith as evident in the law’s teaching concerning Abraham (cf. Gn 15:6; Rm 4:1-22).

**4:1-3.** Beginning in 4:1, Paul presents Abraham as the illustration of the principle in 3:27 that faith eliminates boasting. The phrase **according to the flesh** (v. 1) refers to Abraham being the physical **forefather** of the Jewish people, and does not refer to what he discovered “in the realm of the flesh” regarding salvation. Paul refers several times to Gn 15:6 (Rm 4:9, 22) as he employs Abraham to illustrate the principles of 3:27-31. **CREDITED TO HIM** (v. 3) translates a Hebrew phrase (the verb *hashab* followed by the preposition *le*) that means “to assign something to a person for his benefit *that he does not possess*” (cf. Lv 7:18; Nm 18:27, 30; 2Sm 19:19 [MT 19:20]; Ps 106:31 [MT 106:30]). God reckoned to Abraham the status of **RIGHTEOUSNESS** (“moral excellence and virtue”; see the comments on 1:17) that made him acceptable to God. Faith is not a work that makes one right with God. Faith is reliance upon *another’s work* (after the cross, the work of Christ), and is a gift from God (Ac 18:27; Eph 2:8; Php 1:29).

**4:4-8.** Here Paul explores the principle from 3:28 that justification is by faith. If salvation

were given on the basis of works (v. 4), then it would be a **wage** one had earned that God was obligated to pay. But Paul made it clear earlier (3:24) that **righteousness** is **credited** as a gift (v. 5). Both Ps 32 and Gn 15 use the same Hebrew verb, *hashab*, translated differently by the NASB in these verses (“reckoned” in Gn 15:6; “impute” in Ps 32:2a). Paul used a rabbinic interpretive method (called *Gezerah Shevah*) that links verses sharing common words (here “reckon to”) to demonstrate a general principle. If God credited Abraham with righteousness on the basis of his faith, then David must have had faith for God to “credit” or “reckon” him with righteousness as well. Paul cites Ps 32:1-2 to emphasize that the imputation of righteousness includes forgiveness of sins, a point not found explicitly in Gn 15:6.

**4:9-12.** Paul unpacks another principle presented in 3:29-30, that God justifies everyone (Jews and Gentiles) by faith (v. 9). Abraham was counted righteous while he was a “Gentile” (**uncircumcised**) (v. 10). **The sign of circumcision** (v. 11) is described further as a **seal** (proof or validation of something; 1Co 9:2) of Abraham’s righteous status by **faith**. Abraham’s faith preceded his circumcision (Gn 15:6 vs. Gn 17:9-14). Circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness. Circumcision was a sign that God (apart from human effort) would fulfill His promise, that Abraham had faith in Him, and that God credited righteousness to Abraham on the basis of his faith. Because he was saved as a Gentile, Abraham is the spiritual father of believing Gentiles. But he is also the father of believing Jews (v. 12), for he was a circumcised believer.

**4:13-17.** In 3:31, Paul gave the principle that faith establishes the true teaching of the law (see the comments there), and illustrates it in 4:13-25. **Not through the Law** (v. 13c) is developed in vv. 14-17, and **the righteousness of faith** (v. 13d) is developed in vv. 18-25. **The promise to Abraham** (v. 13) (Gn 12:1-3) could never have been fulfilled if its fulfillment were **through** (by means of) doing **the Law** (v. 14). Everyone fails to obey the

law, exposing oneself to God's wrath (v. 15). If obtaining the promises depended upon one's ability to keep the law, then the whole plan would be doomed. **Where there is no Law, there also is no violation** continues Paul's explanation regarding the reason that obtaining the promise is not through the law. His point here is similar to the one in 3:20 ("through the Law comes the knowledge of sin"). The purpose of the law is to define what constitutes a **violation** ("an intentional act of disobedience to a law or custom"), not to facilitate the fulfillment of God's promises. Paul did not mean that when there is no law there is no sin and no judgment (cf. the comments on 2:12-16; 5:13-14). His purpose here is to explain the function of the law, and its function puts it at odds with obtaining God's promise. **For this reason** (v. 16), **the promise is realized by faith . . . in accordance with grace** (see 3:21-26). **So that** gives the purpose for God's design that salvation be by grace through faith, not by obeying the law, namely, that the promise may be fulfilled with certainty for **all the descendants**, Jews and Gentiles alike. Verse 17 indicates that Abraham is both the father of one nation, the Jewish people, and the father of **MANY NATIONS** (citing Gn 17:5). Although this is stating that there is but one spiritual people of God, ethnic distinctions are not extinguished. The **God** in whom Abraham believed is described as One who **gives life to the dead**, probably a reference to Abraham's and Sarah's inability to reproduce, but may include a glance at the resurrection of the dead, especially Jesus' resurrection (v. 24). God **calls into being that which does not exist**, a reference to the great nation of Israel and its impact on the entire world, which was not yet a reality when God spoke the promises to Abraham.

**4:18-25.** Paul has established that obtaining the promise of God was "not through the Law" (v. 13c; cf. vv. 14-17). Next, he developed the idea that the promise comes through the "righteousness of faith" (v. 13d) in vv. 18-25, with the emphasis on "faith" in vv. 17-21, and "righteousness" in v. 22. **In hope against hope** (v. 18) means "Abraham had hope contrary to all human expectations." Verse 19 explains v. 18. **His own body . . . as good as dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb** recalls what Paul said about God **who gives life to the dead** in v. 17. One might argue with Paul and say that Abraham did waver in unbelief (v. 20). He did not waver, however, after God explicitly told him that Sarah would bear him a son (Gn 17:19). **Grew strong** would

be translated better as "was strengthened." **And being fully assured** (v. 21) reflects Abraham's conviction that God was the kind of God who could bring about what He promised.

Beginning in v. 22, Paul explored Gn 15:6c on the theme of "righteousness." Cf. the comments on 4:3 for v. 22. In vv. 23-25 Paul showed how Abraham's experience was relevant to more than just him. Believers share in common with Abraham the reality of faith, the object of faith (God), and the futility of works of the law in order to be right with God. Christians **believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead** just as Abraham had faith in God "who gives life to the dead" by reviving the bodies of Abraham and Sarah. **Raised because of our justification** means that without the resurrection, no one would know that Jesus' death paid for believers' **transgressions**, and that they now have **justification**.

### III. Blessings: The Results of Being Right with God (5:1-8:39)

#### A. Christians Can Boast in God (5:1-11)

Paul's theme from 5:1-8:39 relates to the benefits that accrue to the believer who has been justified. This section fits with his overall purpose of seeking to motivate the believers in Rome to support his mission to Spain. Unbelievers possess none of these privileges, and the Roman believers should assist Paul in proclaiming them.

**5:1-2. Therefore** (v. 1) introduces an inference from 3:21-4:25 that the believer has **peace with God**. There is a textual problem related to the verb **have** (whether it is an indicative "we have" or a hortatory [commanding] subjunctive "let us have"), but it is probably indicative. Paul begins giving commands in Romans only in chap. 6 (for hortatory subjunctives applicable to believers, see Rm 13:13; 14:13, 19; there are 22 imperative verbs from chap. 6 onward), but none before (except the hortatory subjunctive in 3:8, which is put on the lips of one in error, and the imperative in 3:4, which is purely rhetorical). Rather than encouraging the believer to strive for **peace with God**, Paul continues his statement of doctrinal facts so prominent in the first half of Romans. God Himself has established peace with those He **justified**. **For the glory of God** (v. 2), cf. the comments on 3:23.

**5:3-5.** It is possible that Paul presupposes the need to have faith for this chain (perseverance, character, hope) to be complete, but he does

not mention it here, and it should not be read into the text. His point seems to be that through **tribulations** God will produce in the Christian **perseverance, proven character** (v. 4) and **hope**, similar to Rm 8:29-30.

**5:6-10.** For (v. 6) introduces an explanation regarding how God poured out His love, through Christ's death. The difference between the **righteous man** and the **good man** (v. 7) is that the **good man** has done something tangibly beneficial for another. I might die for someone who has been good to me, but I probably would not die for one who I considered to be righteous, but who had done nothing for me. If God has done the "major" thing (sinners being **justified by His blood**, v. 9, parallel to **enemies** being **reconciled to God**, v. 10), the believer can count on Him to do the "minor" thing (save sinners **from His wrath**, v. 9, parallel to being **saved by His life**, v. 10).

**5:11.** Believers boast not only in the "hope of the glory of God" (v. 2) and in tribulations (v. 3), but **in God** Himself.

### **B. Christians Can Live a Life of Security (5:12-21)**

The connection with what precedes is not clear, but Paul may be presenting the basis of the hope detailed in 5:1-11. The believer can have hope because Jesus has overturned the negative effects of Adam's fall.

**5:12.** Just as may find its conclusion in "even so" (*houtos kai*) in v. 18, but more likely it is found in **and so** (*kai houtos*) at the end of v. 12. "Original sin" is a term used to describe the idea that every person sinned in and with Adam, so that Adam's sin and guilt was our sin and guilt. But Paul is probably not teaching original sin in these verses, for several reasons. First, the phrase **because** [*ep' ho*] **all sinned** literally means "on the basis of which" and signals that everyone sins because the state of spiritual death, and physical death, entered the race through Adam's act. Second, the verb **sinned** *always* refers to an individual's conscious acts, never to sins committed without conscious choice or committed by proxy. Third, **sinned** is probably a "gnomic" aorist, describing a general truth about acts that typically take place, not acts that did take place in the past (see 2:12; 3:23, where **sinned** is also used, but has a gnomic sense).

**5:13-14.** In v. 13, Paul explains how one could commit a sin when there was no law of Moses yet in existence. Between Adam and Moses **sin was in the world** (v. 13), indicated by the fact

that people died in the flood because of their conscious acts of sin (Gn 6:5). With the phrase **sin is not imputed when there is no law** Paul means much the same thing as in 3:20 and 4:15 (see the comments on 4:15). People commit acts of sin even when there is no clear violation of an explicit command, and will experience God's wrath (see the comments on 2:12-16). **Imputed** is a commercial term, and would be better translated "tallied," "accounted," or even "charged to one's account" (cf. Phm 18). The law makes sin an **offense** (better, a "transgression," same word as 4:15) (v. 14)—it intensifies sin and its consequence—but *the law does not create sin*. Sin found its origination in Adam, not in the law. The phrase **those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam** indicates that Paul is not teaching "original sin" as it is typically conceived. Adam violated a clear command. Those between Adam and Moses did not. Therefore they did not sin in and with Adam. Theologically, a **type** is an OT person, object, or event that had a useful function in its own historical setting, but that also was designed by God to prefigure a greater, more spiritually potent situation or person. In this case, Adam was a "type" of Christ since he functions as the founder of the human race and his action had a profound influence upon it. Jesus, of course, is the superior "antitype" to Adam.

**5:15-19.** Here (vv. 15-17) Paul demonstrates the *differences* (**the free gift is not like the transgression**, v. 15) between Adam and Jesus. The differences lie in the effects of the acts of Adam vis-à-vis Jesus. In vv. 18-19, Paul demonstrates the *similarities* between Jesus and Adam, those similarities being found in the comprehensiveness of the consequences of the acts of the first and second Adam.

Paul teaches neither original sin nor the imputation of Christ's righteousness in these verses. He omits altogether *how* Adam's sin has corrupted humanity and *how* Christ's righteousness is applied to believers. His purpose is simply to state that Adam's sin *did* corrupt all those in him, and Christ's gift reverses that for those *in Him*, a point that serves as the ground of great boasting for believers.

**5:20-21.** When Paul refers to the law, he sees it as fulfilling a role of providing information regarding the identification of sin (cf. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13) that results in an intensification of sin, and this is probably the sense of **so that** knowledge of **transgression would increase** (cf. also

Gl 3:19). But in Rm 7:7-13, the presence of the law also brings about the quantitative increase of sin. Paul's point indicates that the law, given after the entrance of sin into humanity courtesy of Adam, did nothing to improve the situation. Only God's super-abounding **grace** proffers sufficient power to grant **eternal life** to those who believe.

### C. Christians Can Live a Life Free from the Absolute Domination of Sin (6:1–7:25)

**6:1-2.** One might wrongly think that it is appropriate to continue to live in sin either so that God might be glorified as He causes grace to abound (5:20), or so that the believer might have a more profound experience of grace. Paul will demonstrate that while both are spiritually possible, both are morally irrational, for sin ruins a believer's life. **Died to sin** (v. 2) indicates that when Jesus died on the cross (cf. 6:10), the believer died with Him in a spiritual yet real sense (cf. the comments on Gl 2:19-20; Col 2:20; 3:1-3; 2Tm 2:11; 1Pt 2:24).

**6:3-4.** **Into** carries a referential sense, indicating that baptism is especially a baptism "with reference to" **Christ Jesus**, and even more narrowly is a reference to **His death**. Paul closely connects baptism with the salvation experience in v. 4, but it is not a cause of salvation. Baptism depicts that aspect of the Christian's conversion that unites him to Christ, especially to Christ in His death. It is the outward expression of saving faith and the solemn symbol of dying with Christ. This was brought about by God so that **we too might walk in newness of life** (v. 4; cf. 7:6, where the Spirit is said to bring about this "newness").

**6:5-7.** The **likeness of His death** indicates that the believer's experience of dying with Christ is not identical to His death. The believer did not die physically upon the cross, but the benefits of Christ's death are experienced when the believer trusts Christ. This union with Christ guarantees the believer **resurrection** with Him in the future. The **old self** (v. 6) is not a reference to the old sin nature, for Paul makes it clear in the passage that it is not a "nature" or part of the believer that is crucified, but the entire person. It is a reference to who the believer was in Adam, under the mastery of sin. That person **was crucified** with Jesus on His cross and no longer exists. The believer is now "in Christ," no longer "in Adam" under sin. **Body of sin** refers to the believer's body as owned, dominated, ruled by sin. **Done away with** means "rendered powerless." As a result, believers are no longer **slaves to sin**, for a dead slave is no longer a slave (v. 7).

**6:8-10.** The believer was united with Jesus in His death, a death undergone with reference to breaking the power of sin (**He died to sin**, v. 10). Jesus rose from the dead, and the believer is united with Him in that as well. If Jesus' condition is irreversible (Jesus **is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him**, v. 9), then the believer's condition is also irreversible. Sin is no longer the slave master over the believer.

**6:11.** Here, for the first time in Romans, Paul gives a true command, the first application of the entire book. **Consider** means "to count, compute, calculate, take into account, to make account of" something, and here means "a deliberate and sober judgment on the basis of the facts one has." The believer is not commanded to "put the old sin nature to death" as he is in Eph 4:22 and Col 3:9 (see the comments there), for this is done for him and her by God at the moment of conversion. Rather, believers are *commanded to understand these profound facts*, and failure to do so amounts to sin (cf. Jms 4:17).

**6:12-14.** Paul continues the application of these truths. **Sin** was personified previously as a slave master, but here as a king who **reigns** (v. 12). **Presenting** is used in the LXX for one serving a superior (1Kg 10:8; 2Kg 5:25; Pr 22:29). Christians are no longer in Adam, under the tyranny of sin as a slave master or a king, but instead are now in Christ, under the rule of God to whom allegiance is owed. Verse 14 is developed fully in chap. 7 (see the comments there).

**6:15-20.** Since the believer is **not under law**, one might think that he is free to live however he wishes. But to live for sin results **in death** (v. 16). Many believe that Paul refers here to eternal death, and that the one who professes to be a Christian but who lives in sin is no Christian at all. This is possible, but Paul seems to be less eschatologically oriented here than is sometimes thought. Paul goes back and forth between reviewing what a believer's experience was before conversion and how life is—or *should be*—after it. **Death** is the experience of the unsaved, but Paul's words contain an implicit warning for the believer as well. **Death** in this verse is something that can be experienced by a true believer, and produces not an eternity in hell for the believer but **impurity** (moral filth), and **lawlessness** (or anarchy) (v. 19) and shame (v. 21). While it is true that an unbeliever receives eternal condemnation for his sin, he also experiences these practical consequences in this life. But so does the believer, and that is precisely Paul's point here. It is morally

foolish for a Christian to live in sin like an unbeliever, and the believer who does will receive the same kind of “death” in this life that an unbeliever receives, namely impurity, anarchy, and shame.

**6:21-23. Benefit** (v. 21) is literally “fruit” (cf. 7:4). Christians are rightly **ashamed** of the kinds of things they did as unbelievers. Therefore, why do them as believers? In v. 21, the **benefit** or fruit of a sinful non-Christian life was shame and **death**. But the fruit of God freeing a believer from sin is **sanctification** (the process of becoming more holy in this life) and finally **eternal life** (v. 22). When a person, whether a believer or an unbeliever, sins he earns and deserves **death**—the moral corruption and hardships that come in this life as specified by Paul in 6:19-21. In contrast to what one deserves, God freely gives **eternal life** to believers.

**7:1-4.** In Rm 7, Paul develops the theme introduced in 6:14 (see the comments there). Law, whether Mosaic or any other, has **jurisdiction** only over the living (v. 1). But Paul wrote that the believer died with Christ in reference to sin (6:2, 6, 8, 11; see the comments there). That death was also a death with reference to the law (vv. 2-4). Sometimes these verses are cited in defense of the concept that Paul says only death dissolves the marital bond, and that all divorce, for whatever reason, is wrong. It is possible that Rm 7:1-4 could be understood this way, but it is unlikely since Paul himself appears to allow for divorce (see the comments on 1Co 7:12-16), as does Jesus (see the comments on Mt 19:1-9). In addition, Paul was simply using marriage, the death of one’s spouse, and divorce as an illustration of dying with Christ so that one is freed from sin. His intent was not to give binding instruction on divorce. To understand this text as representative of Paul’s view of divorce is ill-advised.

**7:5-6.** These two verses forecast the rest of chaps. 7 and 8, and are crucial for the proper understanding of chap. 7 in particular. **Flesh** (v. 5) refers to a conglomeration of human traits that contribute to one’s disposition to sin, also known as “the old sin nature.” **Flesh** has this sense in its ensuing occurrences (7:14, 18, 25; 8:3 [first occurrence], 4, 5 [twice], 6, 7, 8, 9, probably 12 and 13), and in each of its uses in these verses refers to the unsaved, non-Christian state as suggested by its use in 7:5. Because 7:5-6 forecast the rest of chap. 7 and all of chap. 8, and because “flesh” in 7:5 refers to the unsaved condition, it is likely that “flesh” in the

other occurrences of the word in chaps. 7 and 8 should be understood with a similar sense, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise (as noted below). **Sinful passions . . . aroused by the Law** is the topic developed in vv. 7-12. **Death** is the theme developed in vv. 14-25. **But now** (v. 6) refers to the present state of the believer who is no longer “in the flesh” (i.e., no longer in the unsaved condition) nor under the law because of dying with Christ. Christians now **serve** (better, “are enslaved to”; see 6:18, 22) righteousness **in the newness** (see 6:4) **of the Spirit**. The mention of life in the Spirit forecasts the theme of Rm 8.

**7:7-13.** Verses 5 and 6 do not indicate that the law is evil. The law informs about what sin is (v. 7), and this is valuable (cf. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20). Paul employs a rhetorical technique called “impersonation” (Gk. *prosopopoeia*) with which he steps into a role to make a point (similarly, cf. 1Co 13:1-3, 11-12). But identifying who Paul impersonates is a challenge, and there are several interpretive options. First, it is possible that Paul uses “I” to describe the experience of Adam, or, second, of Israel before receiving the law. Third, Paul may be saying that sin is so strong in the believer that Christians should expect moral failure and accept it as an inevitability. In this case Paul is remarkably pessimistic about the Christian life, and in light of Rm 6 and 8, this is an unlikely view. Fourth, Paul’s “I” may refer to a believer who seeks to sanctify himself by keeping the law, an approach to the Christian life also doomed to fail. But sanctification is possible if the believer relies upon the power of the Spirit to defeat sin. Fifth, the preferable view adopted here and argued below is that Paul is describing the futile experience of an unbeliever who seeks to conquer the power of sin by keeping his moral standards in his own power. Paul’s “I” is autobiographical, but represents the experience of all unsaved individuals who seek unsuccessfully to keep their moral code. For the Jewish people, that moral code is the law of Moses. For Gentiles, it is some other philosophy of life they or their culture adopts (e.g., the “rule of fair play”; the Golden Rule; “all things in moderation”). Paul wrote in 2:12-16 (see the comments there) that Gentiles have their own moral code but fail to live up to it. This failure reveals them as sinners for whom condemnation is appropriate. But in chap. 7 Paul discusses primarily the experience of the Jewish unbeliever (7:1, **I am speaking to those**

who know the law), but what he says is equally relevant for Gentile unbelievers who fail to keep their own moral standards.

It is fashionable to maintain that Paul's "I" is not autobiographical since he kept the law competently enough that his conscience did not bother him (it was "robust"; cf. Php 3:2-6), contrary to the "I" in this chapter. However, Paul's law-keeping was sometimes motivated by impure intentions (Gl 1:10), and his pre-conversion conscience was not as robust as sometimes thought (Ti 3:3-6).

The law is good (v. 7), but it is weak, and does not help one who is "in the flesh," i.e., an unbeliever (see the comments on 7:5) break the power of sin *in this life* (not the eternal state, in keeping with 6:14) (v. 8). **Sin**, here viewed as an anti-God force that dominates the unbeliever, leads one to rebel against God. **Apart from the Law sin is dead** does not mean that sin is non-existent. Rather, sin is always active, but it is hyperactive when the unregenerate human heart encounters God's law (**sin became alive**, v. 9; **sin deceived me** and **killed me**, v. 11). That sin was energized **when the commandment came** likely refers to a "moral awakening" when one begins to grasp fully the implications of his moral code and the consequences of failing to fulfill it (**sin became alive** [or "sprang to life"] **and I died**). For the kind of death Paul has in mind (i.e., moral corruption and frustration), see vv. 13-24. The law is good (v. 12), but sin is so strong that it can use the good law as a weapon to kill an unbelieving person (vv. 10-11, 13), for sin influences people to violate the law and bring upon themselves the moral and spiritual sentence of death.

**7:14-20.** Verses 14-25 develop the theme of death introduced in 7:5d. **Death** is mentioned twice in v. 13 and again in v. 24, forming an *inclusio* (brackets) on the whole paragraph, clarifying what Paul means by "death." As in 6:15-23 (see the comments there), **death** refers to "moral frustration and corruption," not the cessation of biological life nor spiritual or eternal separation from God.

Verses 7-13 are dominated by aorist tense verbs, traditionally understood as reflecting Paul's past experience before he knew the Lord. In vv. 14-25, on the other hand, Paul used predominantly present tense verbs, and these have sometimes been interpreted as a description of Paul's present experience as a believer. But it is better to understand the present tense verbs as indicating Paul's *emphasis* in this chapter. His

main point is to explore the unbeliever's moral frustration and corruption due to sin and its consequences (called **death**, not "condemnation," in vv. 14-25), not how "the Law arouses sinful passions" (vv. 7-13). The present tense verbs in vv. 14-25 indicate this emphasis. This interpretation is supported by much of Rm 6, which explores freedom from sin and death (cf. the comments on 6:2-14), and Rm 8:1-13, which reiterates this theme.

When Paul says **I am of flesh** (v. 14; also **my flesh** in v. 18), it is extremely unlikely that he is referring to his *Christian* experience, for no Christian is "in the flesh" following conversion (cf. v. 5). **Sold in bondage to sin** is the experience of an unbeliever, for Christians are no longer enslaved to sin (cf. 6:7, 18, 22). This is an unbeliever enslaved to sin who, like Paul before his conversion, loved the law and strove to obey it, but was frustrated by his inability to do so (vv. 15-17). While Paul does have a category for "fleshly believers" (see the comments on 1Co 3:1-4), his use of "in the flesh" in Rm 7:5, and **flesh** in vv. 14, 18, indicates that he used **flesh** in a way that differs from 1Co 3. Here it delineates the unsaved condition ("while we were in the flesh" in 7:5 indicates that Paul believes Christians are no longer "in the flesh," indicated also by the "then-versus-now" contrast in 7:5, 6), but the use of "flesh" in 1Co 3:1-3 describes true believers who are acting like the unsaved.

**The willing** (v. 18) and **the good that I want** (v. 19; cf. v. 21) refer to the desire to keep the law (vv. 22-23). But Paul already argued that the believer has "died to the Law" (vv. 2-4), another point that supports a non-Christian referent for "I." It is sin in the unbeliever that keeps him from obedience and brings moral frustration (**death** in this passage). In v. 23, **law** does not refer to Mosaic law, but, as in 3:27, means "rule" or "principle." **Who will set me free** (or "rescue" me) cannot be the words of a believer who knows who his Deliverer is, nor is the future tense appropriate for one who is already freed in Christ. **This** (v. 24) probably modifies **body**, not **death**. Paul, playing the role of an unbeliever, mentioned his "members" (body parts) in v. 23, and there those members are dominated by sin and death. This **body** (the entire person, inside and out; cf. 6:6; 12:1) of **death** is a reference to the unbeliever aggravated by the tyranny of sin. Then, as if he could no longer stand to continue his role-playing, Paul erupts in praise to God who has provided Jesus to rescue people



from their wretched unsaved state. Here Paul speaks as a Christian. He abandons the first person singular “I” for the second person plural **our**, indicating a momentary shift out of his non-Christian impersonation. But then he steps back into that role immediately and recaps his discussion in 7:25b, c.

#### D. Christians Have Life in the Holy Spirit (8:1-39)

**8:1-4.** Paul continues with another benefit of salvation by grace through faith. Those who believe in Christ have the unparalleled privilege of living life in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is mentioned only in 1:4, 2:29, 5:5, and 7:6, but is mentioned 19 times in chap. 8. **Therefore** (v. 1) probably introduces a logical conclusion based on what Paul wrote in chap. 7, especially 7:24. **Condemnation** includes both the idea of rendering a verdict of guilt and the punishment that follows. In the context of 7:14-25 and the moral frustration and corruption the non-Christian “I” experiences, and based on the pronouncement of being free of the terrors of the non-Christian life in 8:1-11, **condemnation** here especially focuses upon the believer’s freedom from the crippling power of sin in this life. On the meaning of **law** in v. 2, cf. the comments on 3:27. Verse 3 provides a succinct summary of Rm 7 in which the main theme was the weakness of the law to help an unbeliever defeat sin’s power. For the meaning of **flesh** here and in 8:4, 5 (twice), 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, cf. the comments on 7:5. **Likeness of sinful flesh** masterfully links Jesus closely with humanity because of His incarnation, but maintains a distinction between His body and that of everyone else. He had real flesh, but it was not sinful flesh. **Condemned sin in the flesh** means that Jesus, through the medium of His sacrificed body, pronounced judgment on sin and broke its power. The law could only pronounce judgment but could not “execute” sin. **Might be fulfilled in us** (v. 4) indicates the purpose of Christ’s death. While one is not made right with God by performing the law, Jesus’ perfect keeping of the law is **fulfilled in us**, but the law is not “performed by us.” Christians no longer **walk according to the flesh**, are no longer under the absolute control of the flesh (cf. the comments on 7:5, 14, 18). Those who walk according to the flesh in this verse are unbelievers, not carnal Christians.

**8:5-11.** These verses contrast the values and experience of unbelievers (**those who are according to the flesh**, v. 5—and for an explanation

of the meaning of **flesh** as unbelievers, see the comments on 7:5; those who **set their minds on the things of the flesh**, vv. 5, 6; **those who are in the flesh**, v. 8) with Christians (those who are **according to the Spirit**, v. 5, with their **mind set on the Spirit**, v. 6). Christians experience **life and peace** (v. 6), the primary reference being to the experience of these blessings in this life, while those according to the flesh reap **death** (cf. the comments on 6:15). Verses 7-8 are key verses, along with Rm 3:9-20, for the doctrine of total depravity (man’s inability to obey God and his antipathy toward Him). Paul does not refer to the category of “carnal Christian” in 8:5-8 (for this, see 1Co 3:1-4). Paul places all believers into the category of those who are **not in the flesh but in the Spirit**, since every believer is indwelt by the Spirit (v. 9). The believer is freed from the absolute power and penalty of sin, but sin still exercises dominion over the believer’s body through death (v. 10). Here the word **dead** refers to the cessation of biological life, but does not carry the sense of “eternal spiritual death.” **The spirit is alive** would be better translated “the Spirit is life,” for **spirit** here is better understood as a reference to the Holy Spirit who is the hero of this passage, not the human spirit, and *He is life* (**is alive** is actually a noun, not an adjective or a verb). He is the living and life-giving Spirit, and though believers will die physically because they are physically fallen and sometimes sin, the Spirit nevertheless gives them eternal, resurrection life (v. 11). This is **because of righteousness**, meaning “because believers are righteous in Christ, they have the Spirit who is, and who gives, life.”

**8:12-13.** **Flesh** in these two verses refers to a conglomeration of human traits that contribute to one’s disposition to sin (cf. the comments on 7:5), the “old sin nature.” The believer still has the flesh, though he is no longer “in the flesh” (7:5), just as he has a body descended from Adam though he is no longer “in Adam” (6:1-10). If a believer lives like a non-Christian, **according to the flesh**, i.e., fulfills the desires of the flesh (Gl 5:16), then he **must die** (experience moral frustration and corruption as in 6:15-23; 7:13-24, but probably not eternal spiritual death). **If by the Spirit . . . you will live** probably refers to the believer’s experience of the abundant life by the believer *in this life*. Paul is describing the quality of a believer’s life. If a Christian lives in the power of the Spirit and puts **to death the deeds of the body**, he will experience the abundant

life now. But to the extent that a believer lives in sin (**according to the flesh**, i.e., “like an unbeliever”; on **flesh** see the comments on 7:5), he will experience lack of the abundant life, a “deadly life.” If **live** refers to *eternal* life (and it is often understood this way), then 8:13c teaches salvation by works (namely, by **putting to death the deeds of the body**), which is an unlikely understanding of Paul in this paragraph. While he teaches that true salvation will bring a change in life (e.g., Rm 8:29; 1Co 16:22; Gl 5:18-25; Eph 2:10; Php 2:13; Ti 2:14), Paul’s point in Rm 8 is more practical than eschatological. If a Christian lives like an unbeliever (**according to the flesh**), he will receive what an unbeliever receives *in this life*, namely moral corruption and frustration which Paul here calls “death.” **By the Spirit** indicates that sanctification in the believer’s life comes from dependence upon and cooperation with the Spirit, not through keeping the law.

**8:14-17. Being led by the Spirit of God** (v. 14), in connection with vv. 12-13, relates to the Spirit’s influence in avoiding sin and putting to death the deeds of the body, not to knowing His will when making mundane decisions (e.g., buying a Ford vs. a Chevrolet). The double occurrence of **spirit** (v. 15) is best understood as a reference to the Holy Spirit in light of His work whereby believers are made God’s sons and daughters in vv. 14, 23. The Spirit brings sonship, not dreaded bondage. **Abba** is often popularly glossed with “Daddy,” but it is a term that could be used by adult men for older men they respected so that “Daddy” may carry more of a sense of childish informality than is warranted. In much the same way that wealthier Roman families had a male slave who chaperoned the family’s boys (called a *paidagogos*), so also God gives His Spirit to lead (*ago*) His sons and to help them avoid trouble in the form of sin. The **Spirit testifies** to the believer’s spirit that he belongs to God. It would be odd to say that the Holy Spirit testifies *with* the believer’s spirit, as if the believer’s spirit added anything to His testimony. As the believer studies the Word and sees his life transformed (cf. 8:13), the Spirit impresses upon his mind that he belongs to God. If believers are God’s children, then they are His heirs (v. 17) and may inherit God Himself or what God has in store for them—or both. But the road to glory for Christians is the same one Jesus trod, and His road was marked by the suffering of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Perhaps Paul had in mind the sacrifices the church in Rome

might make in order for him to reach Spain with the gospel.

**8:18-25.** Paul continues both the theme of the futurity and the suffering associated with being God’s heir. At the second coming, believers will see God’s glory (v. 18) as they return with Jesus to earth, but also will have their own glory (v. 21), a glory that surely reflects the glory of Jesus, just as the moon’s glory is found in its reflection of the light of the sun. Verses 19-21 are Paul’s commentary on Gn 3. When Jesus returns to earth with His people, the curse will be lifted from the world. Inanimate creation is personified in this passage as looking forward to the restoration of creation. **Creation groans** (v. 22) probably refers to natural disasters in which human life and property are lost. **Suffers the pangs of childbirth** (v. 22) indicates that the natural disasters are not permanent, and will not continue past the second coming. When calamities happen in the world, they remind the believer that these conditions are temporary, just as a woman’s labor is temporary. Eventually the baby comes, and happiness ensues, and so it will be when the Lord returns.

Not only does creation groan (v. 22), but believers **groan within** themselves (v. 23) **having** (or “because they have”) **the first fruits of the Spirit**. **First fruits** may have OT offering connotations (cf. Lv 23). The first fruits offering was to show one’s trust in the Lord, that if He has provided early aspects of the harvest, He could be trusted for good provision later. God has given the Spirit to believers at the present time, establishing an unbreakable connection between the initial experience of salvation and its end in eternity. The Spirit is both the first installment of our salvation and the down payment of the pledge that guarantees the remaining stages of the work of God in our salvation. Because believers have the Spirit, they have a slender experience of what awaits them, and as a result, they groan. There is no good reason to think that believers’ groanings are not audible. Many of God’s children, when they encounter hardship, have uttered a groan and said, “How I wish Jesus would come back *right now!*” Unbelievers do not express such sentiments, and the fact that believers do should serve to remind them that their utopia is not found in this life. They groan while **waiting eagerly for their adoption as sons**. In v. 15 the adoption is seen as already accomplished, and it surely is, but the full consummation of it awaits the future (a classic text for the concept of “now and not yet”).

**Redemption of our body** refers to the resurrection, when all sin, evil, and suffering are set aside. If the Christian adoption as sons and daughters of God is accomplished (v. 15) but is not now fully accomplished (v. 23), then **perseverance in hope** (confident expectation) is needed (vv. 24-25).

**8:26-27. In the same way** that hope sustains believers when they suffer, so also **the Spirit helps their weakness** when they pray (v. 26), the **weakness** being found in ignorance concerning how one ought to pray. **Groanings too deep for words** is an oxymoron, but describes the Spirit's "wordless prayer groaning" on behalf of God's children. **Too deep for words** means "unspoken," "unspeakable," "unuttered," "unutterable," but in any case these groans are inaudible and therefore do not refer to speaking in tongues. In addition, **the Spirit Himself** performs this intercessory ministry, but speaking in tongues involves the participation of the believer (cf. 1Co 14:14), and while not every believer speaks in tongues (1Co 12:30), *every believer* can be confident of this prayer ministry of the Spirit. If God knows every thought of every person, then He is quite capable of understanding the Spirit's prayers for His children (v. 27). **He [the Spirit] intercedes . . . according to the will of God** provides the basis for what Paul will say in v. 28. If the Spirit prays for believers, then God's loving purposes will come to them. Not only does the Spirit intercede, but the Son does as well (v. 34), and the intercessory work of two members of the Godhead are what guarantees that "nothing will separate us from the love of God," and that believers will never lose their salvation.

**8:28-30.** Believers do not always know how to pray (v. 26), but **we do know that God causes all things to work together for good** (v. 28). It is not clear what the subject of v. 28 is, for the subject is embedded in the third singular verb (either "He/it works together") and "all things" could remotely be the subject (see KJV; NET). But God should be understood as the subject in light of His active role in calling and saving His people (vv. 29-30). Because God is both sovereign and loving, **all things** should be understood comprehensively. Even the tragic circumstances that believers undergo are part of His loving design for their lives, for from them He brings **good** ("that which is morally, tangibly beneficial"). **To those who love God** is defined further by **to those who are called**, so that **those who love God** are not some group of super-believers, but is a category in which *all* believers are

found. **His purpose** is explained in vv. 29-30. **Foreknew** (v. 29) means "to determine ahead of time to enter into a loving relationship with someone" (cf. Ac 2:23; Rm 11:2; 1Pt 1:2, 20). The functional opposite is found in Rm 11:2, where the verb "foreknow" is the opposite of "reject." If "reject" has an active sense in Rm 11:2, then its opposite (God's foreknowledge) is an active, determinative foreknowledge. In other words, His foreknowledge is not simply a prognostication (a bare, passive knowledge of what will happen next—for which see the human forecasting in Ac 26:5; 2Pt 3:17), but a *causative, determinative* foreknowing, where His foreknowledge *brings about* what is foreknown. **Predestined** means "to decide upon beforehand," "to predetermine." **Foreknew** emphasizes God's initial decision to embrace a specific believer, but **predestined** refers to the final eternal goal of His active foreknowledge, namely, believers being **conformed to the image of His Son** on their way to their eternal "destination" (as in "pre-destination"). Sanctification is missing from Paul's five-item list, but that is covered by the last half of v. 29. Being **conformed to the image of His Son** probably pertains not only to what will happen on the day of Christ's return but also what happens in the lengthy period before that return. **Firstborn** does not mean "first created" but rather "preeminent." The same term is used in the LXX for Israel being a preeminent nation, not the first nation God made (Ex 4:22), and for David, the preeminent king compared to all others, not the first king who ever lived (Ps 89:27). **Among many brethren** indicates that God's purpose (v. 28) includes a vast number finding redemption, the restoration of the human race through Jesus' work. There is, in this phrase, a brief reminder from Paul about the obligation the Romans have to promulgate the gospel, especially by helping him go to Spain (cf. "Purpose" in the introduction to Romans). **Called** (v. 30) refers to the effectual call of God. This call is the believer's experience of God's foreknown and predestined plan (cf. 1:1, 6, 7). For **justified**, cf. the note on 3:24. **Glorified** (to experience God's glory with Him forever) is in the aorist tense, as are the other four verbs, and the tense presents each action comprehensively, as a complete (not "completed"), undifferentiated whole, without regard to its internal workings or how it unfolds. In God's plan, He foreknew, predestined, called, justified, *and* glorified each believer. If God foreknows, predestines, calls, and justifies

a believer, then it seems extremely unlikely that the believer might fail to be glorified as well.

**8:31-39.** The contents of Rm 8 indicate that **God is for us** (v. 31). **Who is against us** does not prove that the Christian has no enemies. Paul's point is that those enemies cannot successfully turn God against him or her. If God sacrificed **His own Son** (v. 32) to bring about salvation, then He can be counted on to provide everything else delineated in chap. 8, including eternal life. **Charge** (v. 33) is a judicial term used for asserting that one was guilty of a crime and liable to prosecution and punishment. God, however, has chosen believers (**God's elect**) in Christ, and no one can successfully cause Him to condemn them. For **justifies**, see the note on 3:24. **Jesus . . . died** (v. 34) for sins and took care of the sin problem, something no one could do for himself. He **was raised** from the dead, and having conquered sin and death, He provides eternal life for all who have faith in Him. He **is at the right hand of God**, indicating that He shares God's authority, and that no higher authority exists who can turn Him against His people. And Jesus **intercedes for us** so that Christians always remain in the Father's love. Verses 35-36 indicate that visible threats, including the prospect of death by persecution (**sword**), cannot separate the believer from God's love. On the contrary, in spite of these, the believer **overwhelmingly conquers** ("we are hyper-victors"). In vv. 38-39, invisible threats cannot tear the believer from God's love. Paul concludes the list with the phrase **nor any other created thing**, which includes both the devil *and* the believer. It is inconceivable that a true believer, who at times might not be able to keep his own shoe tied or balance his checkbook, could undo the eternal purposes of God that include His foreknowledge and their glorification. The believer is not nearly that powerful, nor the Spirit and the Savior so incompetent.

#### IV. Vindication: The Jewish People and the Problems with Being Right with God (9:1-11:36)

##### A. God Has Not Broken His Word to Israel (9:1-29)

God will never stop loving believers, and He will keep all His promises to them on the basis of their connection with Christ (Rm 8). But this is harder to assert in light of what might appear to be God's ceasing to love Israel and His reneging on OT promises to the Jewish people. In chaps.

9-11, Paul vindicates God's character, proving that God always keeps His promises, even to Israel, and could thus be counted on to keep His promises to believers.

**9:1-5.** Paul felt great anguish about the spiritual condition of his kinsmen. **Accursed** (*anathema*, v. 3) means "to be cursed," here referring to eschatological judgment. Many scholars argue that Rm 9 is about God's sovereign choice to utilize entire nations to fulfill His purposes in history. But this is unlikely in light of Paul's wish to trade places with his fellow Jews and suffer eternal cursing. The preferable understanding is that God's choices involve the election of individuals for eternal life or its opposite.

Some of the privileges in vv. 4-5 have future components as well as past ones. For example, Israel's **adoption as sons** is grounded in God's selection of Israel as the recipient of His covenant blessings (cf. Ex 4:22; Jr 31:9). But Israel's sonship also has a glorious future component for Jewish believers (see Is 43:6; 45:11; 63:16-17; 64:8-12; Hs 1:10; Mal 3:17, all in eschatological contexts). This suggests, among other things, that God is not finished with the Jewish people yet, the primary point of Rm 9, 10, and 11. The future implications of these blessings gave Paul hope that God had not broken off relations with Israel and would yet keep His promises—all of them—to the people. Verse 5 indicates that **Christ** shares the divine nature, was incarnate, is absolutely sovereign, but is also worthy of eternal acclamation (**blessed forever**). Paul's anguish stems from his awareness that the Jewish people were not (yet!) experiencing everything God promised them, including their own exalted Messiah. Each of the privileges in 9:4-5 belongs to Israel presently (note the present tense **are** in 9:4a), suggesting that these privileges have not been rescinded. Their experience of these blessings, however, is contingent upon faith in Christ.

**9:6-13.** Paul argued that God would keep His promises for "true" Israel. **They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel** (v. 6) is explained by vv. 7-13. The true Jewish people are Jews who are not mere descendants of Abraham but are rather his ethnic descendants *who were chosen by God to be recipients of His covenant blessings* including salvation. In v. 6, Paul does not have Gentile believers in view. He is concerned to demonstrate that what God was doing with Israel in Paul's day was what God had always done with the descendants of Abraham, and Gentile Christians are not in view. Paul's point

is to indicate that “true Israel” consists of the ethnic descendants of Abraham who have embraced Christ, who are the “faithful remnant,” who are a narrower subset of broader ethnic Israel. **THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED** (v. 7) cites Gn 21:12; see the note there. **The children of the promise** (v. 8) comprise the true Israel, the true offspring of Abraham, and those, like Isaac but not Ishmael, are chosen by God to be blessed. For v. 9, see the note on Gn 18:10. But Isaac and Ishmael had different mothers. Perhaps God discriminated between the two on that basis. Jacob and Esau, however, had the same mother and were conceived at the same time (vv. 10-11). **God’s purpose according to His choice** (v. 11) is a prominent theme in chaps. 9 and 11 (see 9:15, 17, 18, 19-21, 22-24; 11:1-2, 4-6, 23, 28-29, 30-32), and indicates that salvation rests upon His sovereign purposes. Verse 12 cites Gn 25:23; see the note there. In the phrases **JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED** (Mal 1:2; see the comments), **HATED** sometimes means “loved less” (Lk 14:26), but that is not the case here. Malachi 1:2 indicates that it has a more active sense. God **hated** Esau by rejecting him, excluding him from the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. This is supported by Mal 1, where God deliberately cursed Esau and his descendants. God’s love for Jacob was manifested in actively choosing him to receive the promised blessings (including salvation). Both Gn 25:23 and Mal 1:2 begin with God’s choice of the individuals, not whole people groups descended from them, and indicate that Paul’s topic was God’s sovereign choice of individuals to include them in His covenant or to exclude them from it.

**9:14-16.** God’s electing love (v. 13) is developed in these verses. The question, **There is no injustice** [“unfairness”] **with God, is there?** (v. 14) means that Paul saw no unfairness in God freely choosing those who are saved. God would be perfectly just to condemn every person and save no one. That He chooses to save some indicates His grace, not His unfairness. Verse 15 cites Ex 33:19 where God reveals to Moses one of His fundamental attributes: that He remains free to show His **MERCY** and **COMPASSION** to whomever He freely chooses. Thus **it** (the bestowing of His mercy and compassion) depends on **God who has mercy** (v. 16). God determines who will be saved. That was true with the immediate offspring of the patriarchs, and it was true with the Jewish people in Paul’s day. God was doing with the Jewish people what He had always done,

namely, sovereignly and graciously selecting some of the physical descendants of Abraham to be recipients of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant including salvation (as indicated by Isaac and Jacob) and rejecting others from it (illustrated by Ishmael and Esau), and this indicates that He continued to fulfill His promises to Israel.

**9:17-18.** Here Paul develops the concept implied by “Esau I hated” (v. 13), using the example of Pharaoh as his illustration. Seventeen times Exodus mentions Pharaoh’s hard heart, the first two being ascribed to God’s decision to harden him (Ex 4:21; 7:3). Only four times does the text say that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex 7:4; 8:15, 32; 9:34), and one of those verses (8:15) says that “he hardened his heart . . . as the LORD had said,” indicating that God was the impetus behind Pharaoh’s hardness. God hardened Pharaoh **TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH**, and because God smote the Egyptians with no less than ten plagues because of Pharaoh’s obduracy, even the inhabitants of Jericho, forty years later, heard and recollected the reports of His power (Jos 2:9-11). By implication, the hardening of Israel resulted in the spread of the gospel into Gentile lands.

**9:19-21.** Verse 19 could be paraphrased this way: “How can God judge people for their sinfulness (like Pharaoh’s or Israel’s hard-heartedness)? Are they not doing what *He* has sovereignly willed them to do?” Paul never gave an answer to the question, but instead reproves the vexed or dismissive attitude with which it is asked. **Answers back** (v. 20) means “to criticize in return” or “to answer antagonistically,” and is found in Lk 14:6, when the lawyers and Pharisees could not refute Jesus on the topic of healing on the Sabbath (“They could *make* no *reply* to this.”). The apostle gave no answer because, in the final analysis, the mechanics of God’s providence over sin is a mystery. The **lump** of clay (v. 21) refers metaphorically to all of humanity from which the **potter** (God) chooses to make a **vessel for honorable use** (in context, to receive His mercy and compassion) and another **for common use** (i.e., to be excluded from His mercy and compassion).

**9:22-23.** The syntax of these two verses is complex, but should probably be understood in this way: But if God endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction

- because He was willing to demonstrate His wrath, and
- to make His power known, and
- to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

*then what will you say to that?* (Paul's sentence is incomplete; he never provided a "then" for the "if" that begins v. 22, so this last phrase is added to make the sentence grammatically complete.)

God is longsuffering (translated **patience** in v. 22) not to provide extra time for unbelievers to be saved, but, in keeping with Pharaoh's example, to afford God a greater opportunity to **demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known**, and thereby to bring glory to Himself as the holy one who will not tolerate sin. See v. 17 for use of the words **demonstrate** and **power** in connection with Pharaoh, who is the concrete illustration of the principles found in vv. 22-23. Ultimately the demonstration of His wrath and power upon vessels prepared for destruction is for the purpose of showing His profound grace toward those **He prepared beforehand for glory**. It is impossible to appreciate God's saving grace unless it is seen against the sobering backdrop of His judgment. **Prepared for destruction** could be translated "who prepare themselves for destruction," but it is preferable to see it as a true passive. While the agent of the preparation is not mentioned in v. 22, the context makes it clear that it is God (9:13, 15, 16, 18, 19-21). If Rm 9 emphasizes God's sovereign role in the condemnation of sinners, Rm 10 makes it clear that the individual is equally responsible for his own sins that result in condemnation.

The Bible teaches that the sovereignty of God extends even to sin, evil, and suffering in the world. God stood behind the hard-heartedness of Pharaoh and Israel's sin of unbelief, but in neither case was *He* to be held morally culpable for their sins. They bear the guilt of their rebellious actions. For a defensible, logical, non-contradictory discussion of the relationship of God's sovereignty and man's free will and moral responsibility, see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 625-734. On a more popular level, cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 315-354.

**9:24-26.** God not only chooses Jewish people to be saved, but also **Gentiles** (v. 24). Paul cited Hs 2:23 in 9:25, and Hs 1:10 in 9:26 (see the

comments in Hosea). By analogy, Paul applied what is said of the restoration of apostate Jews to Gentiles. Paul used these verses to indicate that God was fashioning for Himself a single people, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, reconciled to Him by the work of Christ. But the citation of verses from Hosea does not indicate that "the Church fulfills the promises made to Israel" or that "the Church is the new Israel," for Jewish believers like Paul were fulfilling Hosea's prophecy, and later Israel will be reconciled as a whole (cf. 11:25-26).

**9:27-29.** Paul returned to Israel's situation. In vv. 27-28, Paul cited Is 10:22-23 in which Isaiah emphasized that only a small remnant would be saved, a situation that was being fulfilled in Paul's day (9:6-13). Isaiah also noted that God judges **THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY** (better "completely and finally") those who remain unrepentant. Paul cited Is 1:9, a verse indicating that God had preserved some who had not succumbed to apostasy and judgment. These OT verses support what Paul said in 9:6-23. God was keeping His promises to Israel, and was doing so in the same way that He had always done it—through the remnant of Israel, meaning God was selecting some, but not all, of the physical descendants of Abraham to be in a right covenantal standing with Him, including salvation.

#### **B. God Has Not Cheated Israel (9:30–10:21)**

Many believers are understandably troubled by Rm 9, but beginning in 9:30 and running throughout chap. 10, Paul developed a more familiar doctrine, that of man's responsibility. In chap. 9, Israel rejects Jesus because God hardened her. In chap. 10, Israel rejects Jesus because she has freely chosen to do so.

**9:30–10:4.** **Gentiles . . . attained righteousness . . . which is by faith** (v. 30) provides an illustration of 9:16. Israel, however, did not attain righteousness, for they were "pursuing the law *for* righteousness" (v. 31) (a better translation than **pursuing a law of righteousness**), and seeking righteousness by **works** and not by **faith** (vv. 31-32). Paul cited Is 28:16 in v. 33, and based on its use in 10:11, understood it messianically as a reference to Jesus. As in 9:3, Paul expressed his longing that his kinsmen find salvation in Christ (10:1), another indication that Paul was writing about God's choice of individuals to receive salvation, not His choice regarding what roles people groups would play in history. On 10:3, cf. the note on Php 3:2-12. **The end of the law** indicates that Jesus, by His death, brought

the era of living under the law to a close. Just as the finish line is both the goal and the end of a race, Jesus is the goal of the law inasmuch as it anticipated and pointed toward Him, and He is the end of the law since He brings its era of governing life to a close (see the comments on Mt 5:17-19; Rm 3:21-26; Gl 3:10-4:11).

**10:5-13.** In v. 5, Paul alluded to Lv 18:5 (see the note there), and with it censures unbelieving Israel (see the similar point of allusions to Lv 18:5 in Neh 9:29; Ezk 18:9; 20:11). He indicates that if one insists on establishing his righteousness with God by keeping the law, then he will live (have eternal life) *only* if he actually keeps the law. But Paul already demonstrated the futility of this in chaps. 1-3. In vv. 6-8, Paul cited Dt 9:4 and 30:11-14, where Moses commanded the people to obey the Lord. As in Moses' day when God graciously took the initiative to make the law readily available to the Jewish people so they could obey it, so also in Paul's day He made the gospel accessible as well. Verses 9-10 are sometimes cited to support the idea that one must publicly and verbally confess Christ in order to be saved. Confessing is a result of true saving faith and an evidence of it (cf. 1Tm 6:12; Ti 1:16), and lack of confession may indicate lack of salvation. Much of the apostolic preaching included an emphasis on Christ's resurrection (cf. Ac 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 17:16-31), and it is faith *in a resurrected Christ* that saves one (**believe . . . that God raised Him**, v. 9). In vv. 11-13, Paul cited Is 28:16 again (cf. 9:33), and expanded on the implications of "whoever believes" in vv. 12-13. In v. 13, Paul cited Jl 2:32, emphasizing the universal availability of the gospel.

**10:14-17.** These verses ask questions that ultimately receive an affirmative answer in v. 18 (**Indeed they have**). Regarding the need to get the gospel to the Jewish people, messengers have been recruited (v. 14c), sent out (v. 15a), the word of faith has been preached (v. 14b), the message has been heard (v. 14b, 17, 18), and the message has been understood (vv. 19-20). So, what is the problem? The problem is, they did not believe it (vv. 16-17). Paul's point is that God cannot be blamed for not doing enough to get the gospel to the Jewish people. The problem, at least in chap. 10, resides with Israel's refusal to believe the gospel. Romans 10:14-15 are often used as motivational verses to bolster world evangelization, but the context makes it clear that Paul had in mind the Jewish people, and that, even in

his day, the gospel had made extensive inroads into Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean world. But the mission to the Jewish people has not been completed.

**10:18-21.** In v. 18 Paul cited Ps 19:4 about how creation broadcasts God's majesty everywhere. Similarly, the gospel was disseminated widely enough among the Jewish people and the rest of the world that Paul could say it **HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH and TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD** (v. 18). He maintained that Israel has known its content (vv. 16-18), and should have known of God's plan to distribute it widely among the nations and have them embrace it (vv. 19b-20). Paul cited Dt 32:21b (v. 19) to indicate that God determined to bring salvation to the Gentiles and thereby cause Israel to be jealous when He did it. He also cited Is 65:1 in 10:20, where Isaiah prophesied that God would turn the Jewish people to Himself once again along with Gentiles (Is 66:18-21), the inclusion of Gentile salvation being Paul's main point here. God was doing this in Paul's day with a few believing Jews and a host of Gentiles. In v. 21 the apostle cited Is 65:2 in reference to the many unbelievers in Israel. Is 65:2 emphasizes both Israel's obstinate refusal to embrace her Messiah and God's refusal to withdraw His gracious offer of deliverance.

### C. God Has Not Rejected Israel (11:1-10)

In Rm 9, Paul introduced the themes of election of some of the offspring of Abraham to be His children of promise and the hardening of others. In chap. 10, he emphasized the need for faith in Christ. In chap. 11, Paul weaves together all of these themes, and argues that there is still a future for ethnic Israel in God's program.

**11:1-6.** One might think that Paul believed that God rejected Israel because of her disobedience and obstinacy, but that is a misunderstanding of what Paul was saying. Once again, answering an unseen objector, Paul twice states categorically that **God has not rejected His people** (vv. 1-2). He cites himself as the textbook example that God had not altogether and permanently rejected the Jewish people (v. 1). **Rejected** (v. 2) is the functional opposite of **foreknew**, and indicates that God's foreknowledge is not simple prognostication, but is active and brings about what is foreknown. Paul referred to the record of Elijah (citing 1Kg 19:10, 14, 18), who had an over-inflated view of his own importance and wrongly saw himself as the sole Jew still faithful to God (v. 3). But God spiritually preserved

a faithful remnant of 7,000 (v. 4), just as He was doing with the faithful remnant of Jews in Paul's day and throughout the Church age. This preservation was accomplished on the basis of **God's gracious choice** (v. 5), not **on the basis of works** by the Jewish people (v. 6).

**11:7-10.** The majority of the Jewish people did not attain a right standing with God. Instead, they were hardened (v. 7; cf. also Rm 9:17-18). But the elect attained it on the basis of God's grace. As shocking as it sounds that God would harden some of His people, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures—all contain passages that speak of God's periodic hardening of His people in the past, so that what was happening in Paul's day was no anomaly. **GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR** (v. 8) is a citation of Is 29:10. **EYES TO SEE NOT . . . TO THIS VERY DAY** cites Dt 29:4. Verse 9 cites Ps 69:22-23. God was continuing to interact with the Jewish people in the same manner that He had always treated them, and by noting these precedents, Paul indicates that God had not broken His promises to Israel in Paul's day.

#### D. Israel Is Not Lost Forever (11:11-36)

**11:11-16.** Paul's readers might conclude from 11:1-10 that Israel has permanently fallen from God's ongoing program, but that is not what Paul meant. **Stumble** (v. 11) refers to Israel's temporary spiritual setback, but her condition was not a permanent **fall**. God's hardening of Israel, and Israel's refusal to believe in Jesus as their Messiah, was ordained by God to provide time for the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles (vv. 11, 12, 15). Just as God's fame spread as a result of Pharaoh's hardening (cf. the note on 9:17-18), so also His fame was spreading to the Gentiles in Paul's day because of Israel's rejection of the gospel. As Gentiles embrace the Jewish Messiah and receive the accompanying blessings, God's and Paul's aim thereby was **to make them** [the Jewish people] **jealous** (lit., "to provoke them to be envious" so that they will imitate the Gentiles). Paul was intensely burdened that the Jewish people come to Christ, for when they do, the world will erupt in spiritual vitality and life (vv. 12, 15; cf. Is 27:6). **Their rejection** and **their acceptance** (v. 15) may refer to God's temporary rejection and future acceptance of them, but in light of "their transgression" in vv. 11, 12 and Paul's assertion that God has not rejected them (11:1-2), the better understanding is that the phrases refer to Israel's rejection of God and what He had done through Christ. The phrase **life from the dead** (v. 15) may

indicate that Israel's restoration, and the concomitant blessings for the world take place at the time of the general resurrection immediately prior to the eternal state. But similar phrases are found in 4:17 (God "gives life to the dead") and 6:13 ("present yourselves as those alive from the dead"), and suggests instead that Paul was simply stating the fact that Israel will enjoy spiritual life at a time in the future, with that time left undefined. Verse 16 provides further support for Paul's assertion that Israel will be restored in God's favor. The identification of the **the first piece of dough** and **lump** is debated, as is the referent of **the root** and **the branches**. On the basis of 11:28-29, **the first piece of dough** and **the root** probably refer to the Jewish patriarchs who were upheld by the covenant promises of God. The promises God made to them guarantee an ethnic people who will stand in right relationship with Him (cf. Gn 12:1-3). This happy prospect, however, awaits a future fulfillment.

**11:17-24.** Paul continued to employ the metaphor of a tree to Israel's spiritual condition and awaited restoration. The **branches that were broken off** (v. 17) refer to Jewish unbelievers, and it should be noted that these were not individuals who once were saved and then lost their salvation. While Paul's analogy has them **broken off** from the tree, in reality they were never part of the tree to start with. The **wild olive** branches refer to Gentile believers. The grafting refers to their salvation. The **rich root** refers to the covenant blessings of God promised to the patriarchs. Those blessings sustained and supported Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those covenant promises gave rise to **the olive tree**. The cultivated olive tree branches that were not broken off refer to the Jewish people chosen by God to be the recipients of His covenant blessings, including salvation through faith in Christ. Gentile believers have become partakers **with them** of the spiritual aspects of the Abrahamic and new covenants. Because Gentile believers benefit from the Abrahamic covenant, anti-Semitism is ludicrous (v. 18). Many of the Jewish people would not partake of the covenant blessings of God, and many Gentiles would. But that did not mean that Gentile believers were intrinsically superior to the Jews (v. 19). Therefore, Paul warns Gentile believers not to **be arrogant toward** (v. 18) the Jewish people. A Gentile believer must never think, "I have been grafted into God's blessings, but most Jewish people have not been. Therefore, that means that I am superior, that God prefers me to them." The key to



a right standing with God is not some modicum of ethnic or religious superiority, but **faith** (v. 20). **You stand by your faith** means “You stand *only* by your faith, nothing else!” But Paul makes it clear that if Gentiles do not come to God through faith in Christ, they will not be saved either (vv. 21-22), and if Jews begin to have faith in Christ, they will be saved (v. 23). Paul held out the joyful prospect that some day the Jewish people would come to Christ. God has engineered the peculiar process of Gentiles receiving Jewish spiritual blessings, called by Paul **grafted contrary to nature** (v. 24). That is, if an older cultivated olive tree was failing to produce decent olives, branches from a more productive tree could be grafted into the limbs or trunk of the older tree, and those branches would, in time, produce good olives. But *no one* would take the branches from a wild olive tree and graft them into a cultivated olive tree. Those wild branches would not produce the desired quality of olive. Yet this is what God has done with Gentile believers. Verses 17-24 do not mean that Gentile believers “become Jewish.” While they enjoy the spiritual blessings of the Jewish people, they remain “wild olive branches.” They do not transform into “cultivated branches.”

**11:25-27. A mystery** (v. 25) could be a truth hinted at in the OT but fully revealed in the NT, or one altogether unknown in the OT and revealed in the NT. The latter is the sense here, for the OT speaks of an enormous number of Gentiles being included in the one people of God (cf. the notes on Is 2:2-4; 66:18-24), but the idea that those Gentiles are included prior to the wholesale restoration of Israel is not seen in the OT. **Partial hardening** means that a (majority) part of Israel were not saved based on God’s sovereign choice, but a minority (the faithful remnant) like Paul believed. **Fullness of the Gentiles** refers to the “full number of Gentiles” whom God has determined to be saved prior to Him lifting the hardening from Israel. **All Israel will be saved** (v. 26) is the climax of all of Rm 9, 10, and 11. **All Israel**, according to the use of the phrase in the LXX, never referred to every single Jew (cf. 1Ch 19:17 where it refers only to soldiers; 1Sm 25:1, where it refers only to those who buried Samuel), and more than likely Paul does not mean that in the future every Jew will be saved. **All Israel** should probably be understood to refer to the vast majority of the ethnic people of Israel, Jews from every tribe and from every locale all over the world. For the timing of Israel’s salvation, cf. the comments on Zch

12:10, Mt 23:37-39, and Ac 3:19, which indicate that Israel’s salvation happens during the tribulation period—before, not during, the second coming—and is a necessary precursor for His return. In addition, **all Israel** never referred to every Jew from all time. When the phrase is used in the LXX, it refers to a representation of Jewish people *at a given point in time* (e.g., Nm 16:34; 1Ch 11:10; 15:25; 2Ch 10:3), and Paul’s use of the phrase reflects the same understanding. At a specific point in time that was future to Paul (and to us), a colossal number of Jews from all wings of Judaism will turn to Christ. Paul is not referring to Jewish people who became believers throughout the church age and who are enfolded into the church, and in fact **Israel** does not refer to “the Church” comprised of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, though it is often understood that way. In 11:25, **Israel** clearly refers to the ethnic people of Israel, and there is no indication that Paul redefines the term in v. 26 to mean the Church. In addition, in v. 28, **they** has as its antecedent **all Israel** in v. 26, and in v. 28 the Church is not in view. Paul cited Is 59:20-21 in 11:26b, c, and 27a, and Is 27:9 in 11:27b to provide warrant for his confidence that in the future all Israel will be saved, and it is less likely that they present the time of this conversion. Some view these OT verses as an indication of the time of Israel’s salvation (when the Deliverer comes from Zion—i.e., at the second coming), but it was already argued above that the salvation of all Israel must precede the second coming, so that Is 59:20-21 and 27:9 give the assurance from the OT that all Israel will be saved, rather than establishing the time when that salvation takes place. Israel’s salvation is grounded in the death of Messiah Jesus at His *first* coming, not at His second.

**11:28-32.** In Paul’s day, many of the Jewish people were **enemies** of the gospel, but **for the sake of the fathers** (because of the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; cf. Gn 12:1-3; 15:6; 17:7-8), they remain God’s chosen people and will someday be restored (v. 28). **The gifts and the calling of God** (v. 29) does not refer to the supposed permanency of miraculous spiritual gifts. In context, Paul was speaking of God’s covenant promises that remain **irrevocable** (v. 29). In v. 30, Paul addressed Gentile believers. Because of the hardening of most of the Jewish people, the Gentiles are given the time and opportunity to embrace the gospel. Verse 31 indicates, once again, that the disobedience of the

Jewish people is not permanent. In the future, when a precise number of Gentiles are saved at a time known only to God, God will lift the hardening of Israel and show them **mercy** (v. 31). It is God's intention to show His grace and mercy. In order to do that, He **shuts up all in disobedience** (synonymous with "hardening") so that He may show mercy to all, to "all people groups (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) without distinction," not "all individuals without exception."

**11:33-36.** The doxology that closes this section extols God for His **riches**, possibly the riches of His mercy (v. 32), His **wisdom** (His impressive skills), and **knowledge** (perhaps His foreknowledge so prominent in chaps. 9–11). His **judgments** do not refer to the eschatological condemnation of the lost, but His deliberative processes. Verse 34 cites Is 40:13-14, and emphasizes the futility of fully knowing how or what God has determined, as well as His utter independence of man in executing His plans. Verse 35 cites Jb 41:3, indicating even here that one experiences the "riches" of God's mercy (11:32-33) on the basis of His grace, not through reciprocity whereby He gives grace to those who have earned it. **From Him** (v. 36) indicates that He is the source of all things in the universe. **Through Him** indicates that He is the agent through whom all things exist and come about. And **to Him** means that He is the goal of all that exists and happens in creation, all of which serves to bring Him **glory** (praise) **forever**.

### V. Application: The Implications of Being Right with God (12:1–15:33)

#### A. The Implications for the Christian's Spiritual Commitment (12:1-2)

**12:1-2.** In chap. 12, Paul transitioned to a discussion of the practical implications of being right with God, starting with the proper response to God. In light of the **mercies of God** (v. 1) expounded in chaps. 1–11, Paul urged the believers in Rome to function as **living sacrifices**. **Present** ("to stand before another in order to serve him," cf. Rm 6:13) is a virtual command, the aorist tense indicating not a one-time dedication, but the completeness and comprehensiveness of placing oneself at God's disposal. Unlike dead animal sacrifices, Christians must live to serve God constantly. **Spiritual** (*logikos*, from which the Eng. word "logical" is derived) means "rational," "reasonable," "that which is carefully thought through." **Conformed** (v. 2) means "to be shaped

by a pattern or mold," namely, the pattern or mold of **this world** (*aion*, "temporary era"). Rather than be shaped to look like the world, the Christian's **mind** is to be renewed in order to appreciate the importance and benefits of God's will as revealed in His Word.

#### B. The Implications for the Christian's Life in the Body of Christ (12:3-13)

**12:3-8.** Beginning in 12:3, Paul turned his attention to the social implications of being right with God. **Measure of faith** (v. 3) probably means "the *instrument* for measuring, namely saving faith." Every believer is saved by faith, and if each measures himself against that "yardstick" or "standard," conceit will vanish, and the diverse parts of the local body will work together more profitably for their mutual care (vv. 4-5). The body receives help especially as its members use their spiritual gifts (vv. 6-8). **Prophecy** (v. 6) was not "powerful preaching" or "convicting others of sin." A prophet was God's mouthpiece, His spokesperson who received direct revelation and spoke it with authority to His people (Ex 7:1-2; Dt 18:18, 20; Jr 23:16; for more on prophecy, cf. the comments on 1Co 12:10, and on 1Co 14 as a whole). The prophet is to prophesy "according to the standard of faith" (HCSB), or "in keeping with the Christian faith"—i.e., prophecies must not contradict previously revealed truth. **Service** (v. 7) refers to working in practical ways to assist believers. **Teaching** is the systematic impartation of knowledge or skill, in this case biblical truth. **Exhortation** (v. 8) carries the dual sense of "comforting" (cf. 2Co 1:3-7) and "urging one to live biblically" (Rm 12:1). **Giving** refers to the glad contribution of financial resources to the needs of Christians and the church without duplicitous motives (the meaning of **liberality**). The one **who leads** provides the oversight and direction for the church (cf. 1Tm 3:4-5, where the word is translated "manage"; and 1Tm 5:17, translated "rule"). **Diligence** means "eagerness, hard work, and speed." **Mercy** involves showing sympathy or kindness to those who suffer. For more on spiritual gifts, cf. the comments on 1Co 12–14.

**12:9-13.** While one should serve mainly in the area of his giftedness, sometimes he or she must help more broadly, and this passage explains how that must be done. An act of **love** (v. 9) can be hypocritical if it cloaks an attitude of reluctance or self-seeking. **Abhor** means "a strong feeling of revulsion or aversion." **Cling** means "to glue something together." **Devoted** (v. 10) means "to

be tender and affectionate” to another, as if to a cherished family member (**brotherly love**, Gk. *philadelphia*). **Give preference . . . in honor** means “being eager to value or promote the reputation of another” ahead of oneself. Not **lagging behind** (v. 11) means “not being slack in accomplishing what is worthwhile.” For **diligence**, see 12:8. **Fervent** means lit., “boiling, seething,” but here connotes having eagerness and enthusiasm (cf. Ac 18:25). **In spirit** may refer to one’s inner disposition, but probably refers to the genuine gusto that comes from the Holy Spirit. **Rejoicing in hope** (v. 12) indicates “rejoicing *because of* hope.” **Contributing** (v. 13) is from the verb *koinoneo*, and means “to share”; in this context, sharing one’s resources to help when others have serious needs.

### C. The Implications for the Christian’s Life in Relation to the Secular World (12:14–13:14)

**12:14–21.** Paul moved from discussing life in the body of Christ to how a believer should respond to unbelievers who persecute them. Most of these exhortations are applicable to Christian relationships as well. **Bless** (v. 14; cf. Mt 5:44) means “to call upon God to bestow His kindness” on someone, and **curse** is its opposite. Verse 15 cannot be restricted to interaction only with believers. Nothing forbids the Christian from celebrating (appropriately) or mourning with a non-Christian friend. In v. 16, Paul may be speaking of relationships between Christians, but **be of the same mind toward one another** could equally be a directive “to have something in common” with one’s unbelieving friends. Paul had already forbade arrogance in Christian circles (cf. 12:3), and may be encouraging the Roman believers to avoid spiritual conceit toward their unbelieving acquaintances. **Respect what is right in the sight of all men** (v. 17b) indicates that believers should do and value the praiseworthy things unbelievers applaud (e.g., working hard; giving to the poor). Believers are actively to seek **peace with all men** (v. 18), though sometimes peace is not possible, for an unbeliever may not cooperate. Paul cited Dt 32:35 in v. 19, and ordered believers to let God take revenge on those who hurt them. Believers are to carry out the mandate of v. 20 (which cites Pr 25:21–22). The phrase **HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD** is puzzling, but Pr 25 was probably referring to an ancient Egyptian practice of demonstrating regret or repentance by carrying a pan filled with burning coals. Whatever the case, Paul’s words must be understood in a redemptive light in view of vv. 14, 17, 19, and 21.

**13:1–7.** Paul continued discussing how Christians should interact with the secular world, but his focus shifted here to relationships with the governing authorities. **Subjection** (v. 1; cf. Eph 5:22, 24; Ti 3:1–2) means “to align oneself under the authority” of another, but Paul’s order is not to be obeyed blindly. The Bible is full of examples of God’s people passively resisting religious or secular authorities when those leaders required people to violate clear biblical directives (e.g., Dn 3, 6). **For** introduces a reason for submitting to governing authorities: They are **established by God** (cf. Ac 17:24–26). Because God is sovereign, the governments that exist are there because He ordained their existence. But as in the case of His providence over sin, the governmental leaders are morally culpable for the sin, evil, and suffering they propagate, not God (cf. the comments on Rm 9:22–23). **Therefore** (v. 2), because God founds all nations with their governments, to actively **resist** a secular regime is to rebel against God and **receive condemnation**, possibly both God’s disapproval and formal condemnation from the authorities (cf. vv. 4–5). **For** (v. 3) explains why condemnation comes upon rebels. The government should not be opposed, for it guards the safety and security of its citizens (vv. 3–4). **Bear the sword** (v. 4) may mean “to practice capital punishment,” or it may mean nothing more than “to punish criminals.” But if a government determines that the death sentence is appropriate, it appears from this passage that it has the right to carry it out. **For conscience’ sake** (v. 5) means that if a Christian understands that God is behind the existence of one’s government, then disobeying that government will result in a violation of one’s conscience. **Render** (v. 7) is the same word used by Jesus in Mt 22:21.

**13:8–14.** Paul gave more general commands in this section, but his primary emphasis may still be how the Christian should act in the world. **Owe nothing to anyone** (v. 8) does not forbid taking or giving loans, for both the law and Jesus permitted it (Lv 25:35–36; Mt 5:42; Lk 6:35). Paul’s point is that the believer has the constant obligation to show **love** to all, and this obligation never stops. The verb **love** means “to demonstrate warmth and affection, usually to those with whom one is closely related or associated.” It also has the nuance of joyfully and enthusiastically meeting the needs of others (cf. the comments on 1Co 13:1–3), even one’s enemies (Mt 5:44). Love fulfills **the law**. In vv. 9–10,

Paul describes what happens when believers love others, but he is not prescribing that they must keep the law (cf. Rm 7:1-4; 10:4). Though Abraham did not possess and consciously obey the law of Moses, nevertheless by having faith in God his life fulfilled the law's requirements (Gn 26:5; see the comments there), though he was not saved by fulfilling them (Gn 15:6). Paul's command to love is presented with urgency in light of the rapture of the Church (v. 11). **Sleep** refers to the spiritual stupor that a believer must avoid. Jesus will hold each Christian accountable for his spiritual condition. **The night** (v. 12) refers to this present spiritually darkened era. **The day** probably refers to the inbreaking of Jesus and the kingdom, perhaps to the "day of the Lord." **Armor of light** would provide both spiritual protection and illumination so that one's enemies can be observed and avoided. One of the enemies is the believer's own **flesh** (v. 14; for "the flesh," cf. the comments on Rm 7:5-6; 8:12-13). **Carousing** (v. 13) means "a rowdy gathering typified by drunkenness and illicit sex." **Sensuality** refers to a lifestyle without any moral restraints, usually involving sexual sins. **Put on** (v. 14) was often used for putting on clothes (Mk 5:15; Ac 12:21), and in much the same way, the believer is to take Christ with him wherever he goes, just as he does his own clothing.

#### **D. The Implications for the Christian's Life in His Relationships with Weaker and Differing Christians (14:1–15:13)**

**14:1-3.** Paul addressed "strife and jealousy" in 13:13. Here he addressed a specific concern that could cause strife. Paul presented what he wanted the Romans to do in vv. 1-3, and gave the theological warrant for it in vv. 4-9. The **weak** were Jewish believers who felt that eating meat offered to a false god was an act of idolatry, so they ate **vegetables only** (v. 2). Food was offered in honor of the gods, and surplus fare was sold to the markets to provide income for the priests and maintain the temples. Gentile believers had the conviction (**faith**) that it was permissible to eat this meat. Paul directed the stronger Gentile believers to fellowship with Jewish believers, but not to coerce them to adopt the stronger brother's position (v. 1). They were not to **regard** their Jewish counterparts **with contempt** ("to despise," "to hold a disdainful, harsh attitude of disapproval"). Jewish believers were likewise not to **judge** (here "to nurse an unfavorable opinion of another," "to criticize, find fault") their Gentile brothers, for God **accepted** them.

**14:4-9.** Here Paul gave the theological basis for the exhortations of vv. 1-3. **Judge** (v. 4) specifically addressed the Jewish believers who were judging Gentile believers for eating meat offered to idols (cf. "judge" in v. 3). The Gentile Christians were **the servant of another**, i.e., of God, not of their fellow Jews. Jewish believers, therefore, could not dictate to the Gentile believers what they must do. Scripture was silent on the issue, so **each person** had to **be fully convinced in his own mind** (v. 5), i.e., had to follow his own convictions about what to do. **Day** indicates that Jewish believers continued to celebrate the Sabbath and holy days, though they were no longer under obligation to the law to do so (cf. Rm 6:14-15; 7:1-3; 10:4). Gentiles felt no compulsion to observe them. Both options were acceptable. Each group sought to please God in what they did (v. 6), but ironically disparaged each other when their opinions differed. Verses 7-9 reminded the Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome that only Jesus, on the basis of His resurrection authority, had the right to prescribe how believers should behave when Scripture was silent on an issue. But when Scripture clearly bans an action, the church is obliged "to judge" those whose lives are scandalously sinful (cf. the comments on 1Co 5:1-5, 9-13).

**14:10-12.** Paul reiterated the directives from vv. 3-4 (cf. "judge" and "regard with contempt"). **Judgment seat** (*bema*) was the raised platform where secular authorities rendered verdicts in criminal cases (e.g., Mt 27:19; Jn 19:13; Ac 18:12; 25:6). It never refers to the place where awards were given to the victors in athletic contests. Rewards are given *following* the *bema* judgment and are dependent upon God's evaluation of the believer there, but the judgment and the giving of rewards are distinct both in terms of what transpires and the time at which they take place. There is, in fact, no mention of the assigning of eternal rewards in 14:10-12, only an accounting of each believer to God. Some day, possibly following the rapture of the church, each believer will give an account of his life to God (cf. the comments on 2Co 5:10 and 1Co 3:10-17). The implication is that believers should not denounce one another when their opinions differ. God can be trusted to deal with them if they have done something wrong, and it should be left to Him. This judgment does not pertain to a believer's eternal destiny, but it certainly will affect his rewards (see the comments on 1Co 4:1-5). **GIVE PRAISE** (*exomologeō*, v. 11) would be better translated "admit doing wrong" (cf. LXX 2Ch 6:24; Mt

3:6; Jms 5:16). Paul cited Is 45:23, which affirms that God alone judges on the last day.

**14:13-23.** In vv. 1-12, Paul addressed both the weak and strong, but here the stronger Gentile believers are primarily in view. The **stumbling block** (v. 13) is sometimes understood as the anger that the weaker brother feels when a stronger brother legitimately exercises his liberty. This is possible, but a better understanding is that the **stumbling block** is the pressure a Gentile believer puts on a Jewish believer to violate his standards and sin against his conscience (cf. vv. 22-23). In v. 14, Paul sided with the strong, but made it clear that the actions of the strong could harm the weak (Jewish believers) (v. 15). **Hurt** means “to be distressed, saddened,” possibly even “outraged.” **Destroy** (*apollumi*) here does not mean “to send one to hell for eternal ruin,” for no believer could do this to another. It often means “to damage,” “ruin,” or “harm” (Mt 9:17; Lk 21:18; Jms 1:11), and when the stronger brother cajoles the weaker to violate his standards, the weaker brother is harmed.

**Therefore** (v. 16) introduces Paul’s conclusion to vv. 14-15. It was a **good thing** for a Gentile Christian to eat meat, but if he insisted that a Jewish believer should eat contrary to the dictates of his conscience, then that **good thing** took an evil turn. The **kingdom of God** (v. 17) is manifested in and through the Church, but the Church cannot be equated with the kingdom. **Righteousness** has a horizontal, social sense, “upright actions.” **Drinking** anticipates drinking wine in v. 21. Wine was used as libations in the temples, and Jewish believers refused to purchase and drink wine just as they did meat. **All things indeed are clean** (v. 20) indicates that Jewish and Gentile believers alike were allowed to eat meat, just as Paul did. In v. 22, Paul urged the stronger brothers not to bully the weak into doing something that would violate their conscience. **He who doubts is condemned** (v. 23; also v. 22) does not mean that God will send this Christian to hell. As in v. 22, the weaker brother’s conscience will experience guilt because he or she ate **not from faith**, i.e., because the weak did not have the conviction that it was permissible to eat. If one engages in some practice not clearly forbidden by Scripture, no sin has been committed. But if a believer violates his conscience, *that* constitutes sin. God wants His people to have sensitive consciences in order to avoid sin (1Tm 1:5, 19; Heb 5:14).

**15:1-6.** In 14:1-12, Paul wrote about the need to avoid condemning other believers. In 14:13-23, he urged the believers in Rome not to impose their practices upon others when Scripture did not require it. And in 15:1-13, Paul advocated the need to imitate Jesus, who served others. Verses 1-2 were addressed to the stronger Gentile believers, who were not to impose their practices upon the Jewish believers. They were to follow the example of Jesus (v. 3) who **did not please Himself**. There has always been the tendency of God’s people to insist on their rights to engage in activities—sometimes questionable activities—on the basis of Christian liberty. But the more virtuous approach proffered by Paul is the willingness to surrender those rights for the sake of unity. Paul cited Ps 69:9, where **YOU** refers to God and **ME** refers to Jesus. The rebellious acts (**REPROACHES**) of all humankind against God were laid upon Jesus at the cross in the supreme act of self-sacrifice as He died to atone for sins. The Roman believers were obligated to follow His example, and act in ways that were considerate of others. The Hebrew Scriptures exist in part **for our instruction** (v. 4), and as believers see examples of those in the past who did not live solely to please themselves, they receive motivation from Scripture to persevere in the present and gain confidence (**hope**) regarding the future. See the comments on 5:3-5. Paul then recorded a wish related to the unity he has urged in the preceding verses. Scripture provides perseverance and encouragement (v. 4), but ultimately these come from God (v. 5). The **perseverance and encouragement** relate especially to unity, which is indispensable if this church would be effective in glorifying (enhancing the reputation of) **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** (v. 6) in Rome and in the world. Church unity would enhance their evangelistic endeavors, and would give the church greater capacity and vitality in supporting Paul’s missionary work (see “Purpose” in the introduction to Romans).

**15:7-13. Accept one another** (v. 7) is the same command with which Paul began this section of Romans (cf. 14:1), but here he referred to Jesus as the prime example of accepting those with whom there are pronounced differences (cf. 5:6-10). By His death, Jesus served the Jewish people **to confirm the promises given to the fathers** (v. 8; cf. the comments on Gn 12:1-3). Jesus’ atoning death provides the only means for the Jewish people to experience the full blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Rm 4:13-17; 11:27-29;

Gl 3:1-18). But His death also served Gentiles by providing them an avenue (**mercy**) through which they would **glorify God** for their share in salvation (v. 9). Paul cited Ps 18:49 in v. 9, Dt 32:43 in v. 10, Ps 117:1 in v. 11, and Is 11:10 in v. 12 (cf. the comments on the respective OT verses). These verses have in common the prospect, observed in the OT, that Gentiles would come to know the Lord along with the Jewish people. Paul expressed another wish for the church in Rome (v. 13). The selfless work of Jesus provided the confident expectation (**hope**) expressed in vv. 7-13 that the Jewish people would receive all the covenant blessings and Gentiles would receive God's mercy and be numbered among His people who believe (though without "becoming Jewish"). **Joy** relates to the happy anticipation of seeing one's spiritual hopes fulfilled, and **peace** results when, **in believing** (trusting Him), one has assurance that He will accomplish His promises. The achievement of all God's purposes for the spiritual welfare of His children, including the unity of the church, comes from the **power of the Holy Spirit**. What a fitting closing to the apostle's discussion of Christian living and Christian liberty.

#### E. The Implications for the Support of Paul's Ministry (15:14-33)

**15:14-21.** Not only was Paul confident that the Spirit would cultivate the unity he encouraged in 14:1-15:13, he was also confident that the Roman Christians would cooperate with the Spirit in that process (v. 14), as they could **admonish one another**. But not only would the Spirit do His work and they would cooperate with Him, Paul also wrote to promote unity so that they would more effectively "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:6). Verses 15-16 provide the closest thing Paul gives for a purpose statement for this epistle. He wrote to remind them of numerous doctrinal truths, truths that motivated him to discharge **the grace that was given to him from God** related to his apostolic office. His call was to evangelize primarily the Gentiles (vv. 16-20) (cf. "Purpose" in the introduction to Romans). Romans 15:16-21 contains the most complete statement of Paul's "philosophy of ministry" for himself as an apostle. His focus was on reaching the Gentiles in order to present them as an offering to God. Isaiah 66:18-20 indicates that in the end times the Gentiles will stream to Jerusalem and the Lord, and it is possible that Paul saw his work as contributing to a preliminary manifestation of that end-time event. The **obedience of the Gentiles** (v. 18)

parallels the statements of 1:5 and 16:26, and reflects both the purpose of Paul's work and the reason behind the letter to the Romans. Paul's effectiveness came through **what Christ** accomplished **through him**, and **in the power of the Spirit** as well, including **the power of signs and wonders** (cf. 2Co 12:12) that designated him as a true apostle. If part of the purpose of **signs and wonders** was to prove that one was an apostle, then it is unlikely that they would be commonplace among the people of God. While Jesus and the Spirit were at work in Paul and were the source of all his accomplishments, he nevertheless did his part by **fully preaching the gospel of Christ** (v. 19). There is a wonderful but mysterious connection between God's power that brings achievement and the willing work of His people, but Paul's words credit God for the fruit produced through his work. **Illyricum** occupied what is modern Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The book of Acts does not mention **Illyricum** explicitly, but Paul probably went there on his third missionary journey after leaving Ephesus (Ac 19) and before arriving in Greece (Ac 20:1-2). It formed the farthest northwest area Paul reached before going to Rome. In keeping with his call as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul sought to evangelize in previously unreached areas (v. 20), and justifies doing so with a citation from Is 52:15 regarding God's spread of the renown of the Suffering Servant among the nations.

**15:22-29.** Paul presented his travel and ministry intentions in this passage. He was prevented from coming to the Roman church probably because of the demands of his work (v. 22). Paul mentioned that he was prevented in 1:13 as well, a verse that connects directly with 15:22. It is remotely possible that 1:14-15:21 is a parenthetical aside. What an aside it is! More likely, Paul simply reiterated his plans to visit Rome. For his travel plans, cf. "Date" in the introduction to Romans. Paul's immediate plan was to deposit the collection he gathered from the predominantly Gentile churches founded on his missionary journeys, a task that had occupied him for almost 20 years (cf. Ac 11:27-30 with Gl 2:1-10, c. AD 37-38). It was right for these Gentile churches **to make** this material **contribution** (better, "to establish fellowship" with, v. 26) to the persecuted Jewish believers in Judea, for the Gentiles were **indebted to them** spiritually for having disseminated the gospel (v. 27). This debt remains true today and churches might apply Paul's point by remembering to give financial support to those who labor

at bringing the Good News to Jewish people. He planned then to travel to Rome and to receive financial assistance from them to continue to Spain (v. 24; **to be helped** means “to provide practical assistance for one who must make a journey”). Romans is, among other things, a letter from a missionary seeking to raise support.

**15:30-33.** Paul had three prayer requests for the believers in Rome (v. 30). He asked that they pray that God would protect him from Jewish opponents who would harm him in Jerusalem (v. 31a). God did protect him, but perhaps not in a way Paul would have anticipated nor preferred (cf. Ac 21:27). His second request was that the collection would be favorably received by the believers in Judea (v. 31b). The only indication that it was in fact found in the cryptic statement of Ac 21:17, “. . . the brethren received us gladly.” No wonder! Paul showed up with a crate full of relief funds for them. The third request was that he might get to visit the believers in Rome (v. 32; cf. Ac 28).

## VI. Paul’s Concluding Mandates (16:1-27)

### A. Appreciate Christian Workers (16:1-16)

**16:1-16.** Tucked away in what seem to be “an-cillary” verses concluding Romans are other exhortations that would strengthen the church so it could be more effective in its evangelism. The word **greet** (*aspazomai*) (v. 3) does not mean “to say hello.” It means “to pay one’s respects,” “to salute” (Mk 9:15; for the noun, cf. Mt 23:7), and as an imperative verb, Paul expected the Roman believers to *do* this. Paul named 25 people (17 men; 8 women; two unnamed women, vv. 13, 15, and two households, vv. 10, 11). A possible common denominator for at least some of them was that they distinguished themselves in their service to the Lord and the church (cf. vv. 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 12 twice). Paul urged the church to recognize and appreciate them for the work they did. How would Paul have known so many people from a church he had not yet visited? Under emperor Claudius, all the Jews, both believers and non-believers, were expelled from Rome around AD 49 (cf. Ac 18:2). It was under these conditions that he met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, and probably the others mentioned in chap. 16. One of the people the church should salute was **Phoebe** (v. 1), a resident of **Cenchrea**, about seven miles southeast of Corinth, but who was apparently on her way to Rome, possibly bearing Paul’s letter. Paul called her a **servant** (*diakonos*, “deacon”?) and **helper** (v. 2), and some conclude from these labels that she was one of the pastors of the church. But this

is unlikely. Paul was not discussing those in formal church offices, and *diakonos* often has the non-technical sense of “servant” (cf. Mt 20:26). But even if she were a “deacon” in the technical sense, deacons were not entrusted with the primary leading or teaching ministry of the church. **Helper** sometimes meant “ruler,” “leader,” “chief,” but often meant “patron, one who supports another from his or her resources.” The latter sense is preferable here, for it is unlikely that Paul would call anyone other than Jesus his ruler.

A similar issue relates to the woman **Junias** (v. 7) who was **outstanding among the apostles**. It is possible that **Junias** was an apostle just as Paul was, and exercised considerable authority, but the grammatical construction is against it. The phrase is made up of the word “esteemed” or “outstanding” (*episemos*) + the preposition *en*, “in” or “among” + a word in the dative case that has a person or a group as its referent, in this case “apostles.” This construction was usually used in Greek for an individual or a group who was held in high regard by another group to which the esteemed person(s) did not belong. In other words, the best evidence suggests that the apostles thought very highly of both **Andronicus and Junias**, or that they were well known to the apostles, but neither were apostles.

### B. Avoid Contentious People (16:17-20a)

**16:17-20a.** Paul addressed a final concern that could keep the church from being strong for supporting his venture to Spain. The Christians in Rome were to **turn away from** those who spread false teaching, from those who were enslaved to their own desires (vv. 17-18). Their teaching caused **dissensions** (“the division of a unified group into two or more discordant ones”) and **hindrances** (“that which causes indignation and antagonism”). Paul was confident of their ongoing **obedience** to the truth (v. 19). It was God who established peace in the church (16:20), not Satan, who probably placed the dissenting teachers in proximity to the body to disrupt it. On the role of believers in judging angels, including Satan, see 1Co 6:3.

### C. Be Encouraged by Christian Leaders (16:20b-23)

**16:20b-23.** That some of Paul’s foremost assistants were thinking of the church in Rome might have been a great encouragement to the believers there. **Lucius** (v. 21) may have been the same Jewish believer as “Lucius the Cyrene” in Ac 13:1, but it is impossible to be certain. **Jason** may be the same individual who was converted under

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica, and who provided housing for Paul (Ac 17:5-9). **Sosipater** is possibly the same person called "Sopater" who accompanied Paul on his way to Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary journey (Ac 20:4). **Tertius** (v. 22) was Paul's amanuensis (secretary). He wrote down what Paul dictated to him. **Gaius** (v. 23) was possibly one of the first converts in Corinth (1Co 1:14) whom Paul baptized, and is probably a different person than the Gaius mentioned in Ac 19:29, who was from Ephesus, or 20:4, who was from Derbe. **Erastus** was apparently a high-ranking city official, and an inscription discovered in 1929 in Corinth refers to an Erastus who was the head of Corinth's city works. It is impossible to say that this is Paul's Erastus, but the name was relatively rare. **Quartus** is not mentioned elsewhere in the NT.

#### D. Glorify God (16:25-27)

**16:25-27.** Paul's doxology is long and meandering, but a good guess at its structure is suggested in the following paraphrase:

"(v. 25) Now to Him, (skip to v. 27) to the only wise God, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ. (Back to v. 25) He is the One who is able to establish you, and that establishing comes about through the gospel, namely, the gospel which coincides with my preaching about Jesus Christ. This gospel also coincides with the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages past. (v. 26) But this mystery has now been manifested. Furthermore, God not only establishes you according to my gospel (cf. v. 25), but (v. 27) also by the Scriptures of the prophets who gave their revelation as our eternal God commanded them.

Those Scriptures of the prophets have been made known to all the nations to promote in them the obedience which saving faith produces. (Reiterating v. 27) To Him be the glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen!"

The doxology appears to emphasize three points: First, the gospel has continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures, but it was not fully understood until God manifested it in the epoch-shifting life and death of Christ and the evangelizing work of Paul and the other evangelists. Second, it was this gospel that both strengthened believers and produced active faith among all the nations. Third, God brings glory to Himself forever through the gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings about such profound change and unveils His unparalleled greatness. For these reasons, the Romans should spread the gospel themselves and support Paul as he sought to do so in Spain. For the details on the contents of this doxology, consult the commentaries by Moo and Schreiner listed in the bibliography.

Paul concluded his letter by referring once again to the **obedience of faith for all the nations** (cf. the comments on 1:4-5 and "Purpose" in the introduction to Romans). The letter to the Romans has as one of its major themes the need for the church in Rome to engage in spreading the gospel, especially by supporting Paul's plans for Spain. Any church or believer today that has lost a sense of urgency and fervor for reaching lost people would do well to study this letter. Understanding the gospel as the power of God should serve to energize a passion for souls and a desire to glorify God.

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